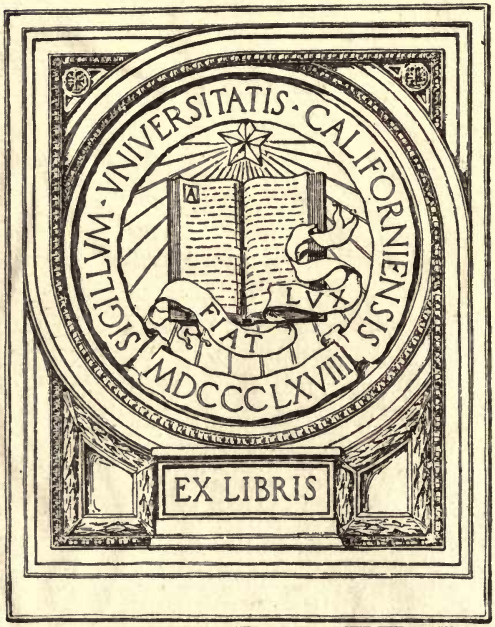

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FROM FOX'S EARTH TO MOUNTAIN TARN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

WILD LIFE OF SCOTLAND
WILD FLOWERS OF SCOTLAND
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TAIL STREAM OF A MOUNTAIN TARN, GLEN CLOVA

FROM FOX'S EARTH TO MOUNTAIN TARN

DAYS AMONG THE WILD ANIMALS OF SCOTLAND

BY J. H. CRAWFORD

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book is a contribution to the natural history of Scotland. It tells of days among the wild creatures; days selected from many days, because more crowded with incident, against a picturesque background. It starts from the earth of a lowland fox, and ends by a lonely mountain tarn. It ranges from the border to Shetland, from burn to river, from shaded lane to fenceless moor and bare mountain top. Trout and salmon, singing-bird to eagle, field mouse to deer—all find a place. The current ripples; the rings break out on the pools; in the twilight the voles come forth from their tunnels. The rod flashes its silvered line; the bay of the hound, the crack of the gun echo through the pages. It is confined to the north. Scotland is, perhaps, the only part of the British Isles where the term wild life has much meaning.

The object is to open the general eye to the charm, to waken an interest in the general mind. Nothing is so fatal as indifference. Rare forms have passed out of existence, others are passing.

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Introduction

Our land is poorer than she was, and richer than she will be. Against this depletion I strive with all my might.

Alike to pursuer and pursued, Sport is bright and bracing. Pleasant are her footmarks along the stream bank above the sedges ; her breath, the purple moorland breeze that brushes the heather. But she may be ugly, and try the patience of those who love her most wisely. Modern sport selects such as she cares to follow, and kills out their enemies. A wild creature without natural check is ever, more or less, tame and unfit. Among the doomed are the wild cat, the greater weasels, and the birds of prey. More than any others these forms make of Scotland an interesting land, and ought to be her chief charge. Sport owes much to them. Without eagle and falcon were no twelfth of August.

J. H. CRAWFORD.

1906.

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FROM FOX'S EARTH TO MOUNTAIN TARN

I

LOWLAND AND HILL FOX

WITH a very troubled face, the gamekeeper came in to report a tragedy of the previous night. The pheasantry had been entered, and seventeen birds taken or killed. By a diabolic ingenuity the depredator had managed to get over, or through, the wire-netting fence. A great deal of noise was made about the loss. Blame was scattered indiscriminately. There was but one oversight. The chief offender was overlooked. He was a chartered raider.

My host asked me if I cared for a walk. A young hound, blotched black and brown, loosely put together as growing lad, mainly feet and head, sprawled along the moist path. Awkward and good-natured, it insisted on following us to the edge of the lawn, where a gap in the hedge let us through, on to the grass. It was being

"walked" against the approaching day for puppy judging: a curious system of boarding-out, confined, so far as I know, to young foxhounds.

The country round about was mainly grass and woodland, an excellent combination for scenic effect, of that soothing and idyllic kind known as pastoral. Some workmen were engaged in making gateways, for the benefit of those who would rather not take the fence. A somewhat ingenious latch, easily lifted by the whip, enabled the rider to gain passage without dismounting. Thus there would seem to be a theatrical element in sport: an appearance of daring meant to impress the gallery. The great shaggy Highland cattle lent the last picturesque touch to the environment. Down the face of the green slope we went, to the stream running along the foot. "I brought you to see this, because I thought you would be interested." There was much to interest.

It was a fox's earth, wider than, but in no other way differing from, a rabbit's hole. Though not naturally a burrower, the fox may enlarge what is already there. In this case, it seemed to have taken possession after, probably, consuming the previous tenant. The surroundings were untidy and unsavoury to a degree. The fox is not a clean feeder, nor does it take the trouble one would look for in so quick-witted an animal to remove the tell-tale evidence of its whereabouts.

It were difficult to say what of fur and feather was not there. A casual glance showed hare and rabbit, wood pigeon, and some trophies from the farmyard ; altogether an excellent larder.

Two heron rose as we approached. Other parasites were known to come ; wild creatures that crawl up, or drop down from aloft, when the tenant is occupied elsewhere. The carrion crow finds the heap congenial, also the magpie, with which the surrounding woods abound. Rascals, both of them. Sometimes their effigies are added to the pile. A tempting bit is placed within easy reach, while the trapper is out of sight, just within the hole. Set a thief to catch a thief. Even the more reputable had no objection to share in the spoil. Is it not so in human life? The fox has quite a big following.

My companion was curious and thoughtful. He picked up one after another of the fragments, examined each carefully, and let it fall. At length he seemed to get what he was in search of. An indulgent smile—such as that of a parent at the clever trick of some mischievous child—broke over his face. "You know that, I suppose?" It was the feather of a cock pheasant.

A careless hand took up the relics of the partridge. Its presence was a matter of course, calling for no remark. The feathers went uncounted. No wire-netting was set around. It lived out in the field, and had to take its chance. Leaning

with his arms on the fence, the owner had watched the fox as, in broad daylight, it quartered the field, or stalked the sitting bird against the wind, or along the hedgerows. It was shrewdly suspected of picking up the chicks tottering among the green corn-stalks, and so decimating the coveys for the wing. Even now, with the vixen out on the forage, their calls come in from all around.

Yet it was a shooting county, second to none in Scotland. On the fields and pastures round the manor-house the first of September was a red-letter day, as the twelfth of August on the hills. To the stay-at-home squire of the old school it had a charm all its own, a savour of the harvest, a fulness of restful and idyllic traditions. He walked across the young grass, and the heavy whirr of wings was music to him. He glanced at the turnips, less as food for the cattle than as shelter through which he would wade, until his two liver-coloured Irish spaniels stood to the point.

And here was wholesale slaughter condoned; against the increase of which no precautions were taken. Inside were five cubs. For their growing appetites this pile had been raised. It would be added to at nightfall, when vixen and dog returned with the spoils of the day, and through the nights and mornings to come. Very simply could the pangs of hunger have been allayed.

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NEST OF THE PARTRIDGE

A spade would bring them forth, and a shot do the rest. Soon would they be abroad, foraging for themselves. Still they would grow, nor would any check be placed upon their depredations till the cub hunting, at the back end, when the mischief had been done, and partridge shooting had passed its hey-day. The excuse for donning a red coat, the meet by the leafless wood, and the warm gallop over the winter fields cover a multitude of sins.

In the absence of other food—an exceptional condition, perhaps, in a countryside like this—the vixen might take a lamb. Perhaps no wildling naturally takes tame animals, except as the survival of instincts dating from the time when both were wild. The fox which raids the flock is a rascal, and if many do, it only shows that they are demoralized by their semi-artificial life. The master of the hounds pays the damages; with a shrug of the shoulders when too many lambs are killed, but without reflecting on the character of the thief, or the honesty of the account.

The scene is not always so lifeless. The raider slips in with the supper in his mouth. Half an hour after, when appetites are appeased, the family appear through the opening. All work is not good even for foxes. Evening is the playtime, the break in a strenuous life, the one hour of innocence. So it is through the range of wild life. The vixen puts aside her cunning and her gravity.

Lying down on her back, she pats with her paws, and watches the cubs as they roll over and over, like so many puppy-dogs. Nothing is more delightful than to see a family of foxes at their evening play. It is then that the gamekeeper comes about, and from a distance—that he may not disturb the revel—counts up his treasures and sees that there are five. Likely enough the vixen knows he is there, and that he will do no harm.

This is a hunting as well as a shooting county. The gamekeeper has a complex duty unknown on the moors and to the highland gillie. He must look after his game, and he must look after his vermin; he must know where his partridges are nesting, and where his foxes are cubbing; he must make enclosures for his pheasants and coverts for enemies; he must raise his game in captivity and in due season turn them out: so, if need be, must he do with his foxes. If the stubble and turnips must yield a normal number of coveys, the coverts must also yield. Indeed, hunting is the more popular form of sport.

Here, then, is an interesting state of things. Vermin are preserved. Wild life is not only left to keep its own balance, but man comes to its assistance. Whereas, under natural conditions, the number of foxes would probably be less than it is, man maintains it at the highest level the countryside will stand.

The outcome is that game is not killed out. Enough are left to satisfy all, save those who aim at a partridge poultry yard. In crossing the field one startles, and is startled by, the covey. In cutting the rath grass, the scythesman lays bare the olive eggs. More would be there but for the advantage lent to the fox. It is not quite a fair test. In the duel, partridges learn to look after themselves, that is, are really wild birds. They are alert on the ground and strong on the wing. So it is on the fields.

On the hills the balance is on the other side, so far, at least, as men can influence it. Whereas grouse is a decaying cult, whose future gives rise to serious misgivings, the partridge is robust, with a reserve of vital energy. There is thus a sporting element in the lowlands absent from the hills, if for no higher motive than to guard the interests of another sport. For the sake of the partridge alone it is worth while to preserve the enemy; but if the fox can be made to serve a use of its own, there is no reason to grumble.

Foreigners do not understand this fox-hunting of ours. They call it running after an evil-smelling animal. A half-serious proposal has been made to present us with all the cubs. So the genius of nations differs even in sport. According to George Du Maurier, an English host asked a distinguished Frenchman how he liked

"the meet." With characteristic suavity he pronounced it charming. "But," with an inimitable raising of the shoulder, "zare was no promenade, no band of music—nossing." It is just possible that the criticism has some point. Fox-hunting may not have all the elements of a refined sport; but it saves one native animal which must otherwise have disappeared, and keeps in health another which must have been enervated. Round the manor-house it preserves the balance of life.

A northern cult are the foxes. They grade into one another, mainly as they approach or cross this or that parallel of latitude, to live under differing climatic conditions. It is simply the influence of environment acting upon a single species whose varieties would probably cross, over the whole range. The differences are on the surface. The fur may be touched as with hoar frost, or snowed over. We speak of the silver and the white fox. The silver fox is lovingly known to the furrier; and in the winter wear of the dainty.

The lowland fox grades into the hill fox. That is, as far as the range within our seas will allow them to go apart. There is neither gap nor line between. On approaching the hills, the fox begins to vary. The change is not in colour, at least, not much. Such as it is comes about naturally enough. In the rougher country certain muscles are brought into fuller play. Length of leg gives

an advantage, and so a stronger frame is built up, standing higher from the ground. Over a certain common area the two varieties cross, and are indistinguishable.

A stronger character goes along with the stronger build. The coverts are natural, the range ample, the life free, unpampered, and uncribbed. It is a wild animal, living under perfectly wild conditions, wild as the otter of the highland stream, wild even as the banished wolf. All this appears in its more upright gait, and bolder survey of the intruder on its haunts.

South of the Tay it is bad form to kill a fox. Captain Forrard, passing on his hunter, asks after Mrs. Shoddington's collie. "Ah, Fanny, poor dear; our keeper shot it in mistake for a fox." Out of respect for the sex he held his peace. It marks the man as a boor and the woman as an upstart, ay, and a culprit as well. It is a breach of the decalogue of sport. Wherefore should the "Thou shalts" be altered into the "Thou shalt nots"?

All the heinous offences of the raider are put down against the day of reckoning. But what does it more than others? Item: it kills lambs. I am afraid it does, especially at the season of the year when the golden eagle may pick up a deer calf; so, too, does its lowland cousin. The offence is one, not so the punishment. The redress is handed over to the shepherd, who smiles at the

loss of his lowland lamb; but here has no redress, save to take it out of the culprit.

As is often the case, the evil is much exaggerated. The wilder an animal the less it cares to touch what is not wild. It may have a contempt for the herded, or a vague sense of wrong in outwitting the herd. Certainly it is not guilty of one tithe of the nefarious deeds of its cousin. Both may sneak away with a hen, while carrying off a rabbit with a certain measure of self-respect. A lowland fox will enter a pheasantry much more readily than a hill fox. A single cunning collie dog, which may well belong to the shepherd, will do more damage to a flock in a night than all the foxes on the hill for a season.

An increasing number of upland moors have no sheep on them. The reason is that these hills have been taken for moor or forest. If the sheep farmer grumbles at the fox for taking an odd lamb, much more does he grumble at the sportsman for making lambing impossible. If Saul has slain his thousands, David has slain his ten thousands. If a gun is to be put into the shepherd's hands to solve the lambing question—why, it might be awkward!

Remains of grouse appear among the débris by cairn or moraine. But so were the fragments of other game found round the earth by the streamside, and not a word said, nor any steps

taken, nor any blame, moral or otherwise, attached. As the partridge to the lowland fox, so the grouse to the hill fox. But the point of view is not quite the same. Traps are so set round the lair that when the vixen comes out she must get into one of them. The cubs die of starvation, and the dog fox when he arrives to see what has come over his mate is shot.

As a matter of fact he does not kill many grouse. The wing is sufficient protection to any vigilant bird against a ground enemy. If he falls an occasional victim, that only means that his vigilance should be increased. He must learn to look about him more sharply, be fitter to live, and be a game bird. The fox is as much a friend of the sportsman as the golden eagle, and takes less toll for it; the gun turned on him shoots a friend. If the grouse is to be as virile as the partridge, like the partridge, it must owe it to the fox.

The white hare has no wings, and is much more easily got. The main function of the hare seems to be to feed the golden eagle and the fox, and keep them from seeking food elsewhere. Many troublesome smaller creatures, which by increase of numbers might become vermin, are consumed in times of stress. The evil manners live in brass, the virtues we write in water. For his grave misdemeanours the only fine exacted from the lowland fox is that, some day or other, will be a run

for his brush. Is it not time that the hill fox had a run for his brush?

It seems to me an indictment against sport that out of three or four possible animals—for our country is not rich—it should be unable to find a place for the likeliest of all. The factors are present,—a game animal, and an arena which gives the quarry an advantage. What more is wanted? Hunting is said to be impossible. Certainly, hunting of the showy sort—such as suggested to the foreigner an obvious omission—were not easy, and might lead to a break-neck down the corrie. But hunting with thew and sinew, if not easy, is quite possible, and presents even certain attractions. All that is wanted is a sportsmanlike spirit. There is a waste of good material, a marvellous lack of ingenuity. Can no one come to the aid of heavy-witted man?

Sportsmen go to the stream without a horse—which might be awkward there also, and probably put them in the water. In the otter hunt we seem to have a new form of sport, or perhaps a revival of old healthy forms. Women wade waist deep after the quarry. The doing of it opens a new world—the morning air, the cool shadows on the pool, the mystery and grace of running water. The mountain has as much to show as the stream. The airs are as fresh, the corries cast shadows as cool and deep. Jocund morn stands tiptoe on the summit. A scramble on the

slopes is as good as a scramble on the banks. Neither suggests music, and both are better than a gallop. The wildling of the breezy heights is quite as interesting as the wildling of the cool water. If the hunt saved the otter, why should it not also save a comrade? It is wretched form to give the fox over to be pelted and baited, trapped and shot at by clowns; and all for lack of wit.

If men do not care to hunt the most resourceful and beautiful animal left to us—if women do not dare to climb to the moraines, when the shadows bend west across the glens, ere they shorten on the self-shadowing hills—if the glorious brush serves no nobler purpose than for the shepherd's dog to worry, let it be. Perhaps it is as well so. Sport might spoil the wildling, as it spoils all it takes in hand, might make it a pet or a sneak. In spite of persecution it abounds; because of persecution it is virile. If a few adults are shot and a few litters starved, sufficient escape to breed again. Some more cunning lair will be found. It is all over the highlands and the southern uplands, and there is the fierce satisfaction of having no one to thank.

In the grave wild life are play times; and moods, seen not at all, or only by those who are much abroad. When the crimson is deepening into purple along the slopes, the cubs come from the lair under cairn or moraine for the children's

hour. One who knew his faults describes the mountain fox interesting as beautiful, graceful in his every movement. Never so beautiful as when thus playing, unobserved by his enemy, man. He tells of the reluctance with which, even when he seems to deserve it, one should send a bullet among the charming group.

Photo. Chas. Reid

YOUNG FOXES, WITH VIXEN

II

EAGLE AND FALCON

"I PRESERVE the golden eagle, but shoot the peregrine." So, on 30th April, 1893, wrote the late Duke of Argyll, concerning the two noblest forms of winged life. From an enlightened proprietor, a humane man, and one profoundly interested in wild creatures, this represented rather more than the sentiment of the time. The average position is tersely put in the words of another correspondent. "We are better off without the one and I do not see that the other is of any use." There were those, not enlightened nor humane, who cared for neither falcon nor eagle—perhaps, could scarcely distinguish one from the other and shot both.

Intelligence selects; ignorance kills. Self-interest rules throughout, with a milder or ruder sway, hindering the action of an awakening æsthetic sense even in the most tolerant. Some have an eye a little more discriminating than that of a gamekeeper, which is no more than might reasonably be expected. Many have not. In

all the gamekeeper is represented. Where are deer forests are occasional depredations, especially when the demands of the ærie are insatiable.

From some lofty perch, the eagle watches where the calf is hidden for the day. With a quick, feminine instinct the hind—ere she turns the bend of the hill to join the herd—looks back. And her heart stands still, because of that double speck in the air. The eagle ascends dragging something aloft, as though bearing a second Ganymede. It opens its claws. A quivering mass falls through the air; and so it kills the calf. With a low whimper, the hind speeds back —too late. Such tragedies are in the wilds; such intense moments and breathless incidents. Others see, and are wroth that a royal head has gone. On the Argyll estates is no deer forest.

For the rest of the year, and even in times of stress, the eagle prefers a mountain hare. It is not quite so heavy to lift, and may be carried to some convenient perch, far from the reach of disturbance. Fur is the favourite food for feather. Where are plenty of hares, other forms of life are fairly safe. In deer forests, the loss is inconsiderable. With a tendency to over-increase—so that an annual slaughter of the hinds takes place each December—two or three calves can scarcely be missed.

Perhaps Argyllshire is not a sporting county

of the first order ; not as Perthshire, for instance, nor parts of Aberdeen down Braemar way. In common with all the west country, it suffers from the blight of damp. The west winds trail their dripping fringes over the hill slopes, thus sifting themselves of their moisture, till they become the dry mountain breezes of the central Grampians. There are moors with grouse large if few. And a golden eagle will pick up a grouse.

Still an eye with the light of reason in it might see that this is not serious. And it is quite conceivable that the intelligent owner of a moor might look on with tolerance. The depredations of a pair do not greatly lessen the August bag. Some have found the blue hare a greater enemy of sport than they, and acknowledged the services in its removal. To spare the golden eagle over the purple heather, and against the speedwell blue of the sky, is to borrow from nature a spark of beauty at very little expense. To some that may not mean much ; but it is so. When it flops down on a grouse, it may be doing a benefit. It is a messenger of nature. And, in a certain lofty way,—perhaps outside ordinary reckoning, but which I shall try to make good,—a servant of the lessee.

Who is not charmed with the rich dark plumage of the red grouse, or would have it altered ? Is it not part of the glamour and the spell ? It is autumny—of the heather when it blooms. It

is moorland and hill incarnate. It excites ever so fresh emotions—calls up ever so delightful visions—leaves an unfading glow on the spirit. The nearest relative is the willow grouse, of more arctic climes. The cry is much the same; the eggs are indistinguishable. In one thing do they differ. The willow grouse turns white in winter, and at all times is paler hued. Charming and sympathetic as the plumage is, in the natural haunts of the bird, here it would be out of place, and fatal. So that when the bird came to Britain it changed into the red grouse. A tendency to reversion is checked, and the hues are kept toned to the sober mountain slopes.

Feathers with their varied and exquisite touches—so rich at the shooting time when most seen—we owe to selective agents. They are the largesse of an enemy of the individual, and a friend of the cult.

On the scant wages of a few birds, to vary the diet, the work goes on ceaselessly, and with such charming results. August by August, grouse appear as they were, indistinguishable from the background, in the delightful sympathy of toning. Unaided, the background could not so tone them to its hues, take them to itself. Of selective agents the golden eagle is one.

With head curved, he seems a speck. More than one crouching covey baffles even his keen eye; so perfectly has the work been done. Even

the low flight from place to place is lost, against a background which takes its living creatures in charge and hides them from an eye aloft. At length the eagle pauses, excitedly. Some defect in the shading has betrayed the quarry. Some imperfect feather has crept in unaware. Some careless touch of a brush not dipped in heather. Nature condones no mistakes, not even her own.

And we shoot the artist. It is barbarous. Had there been as many silly people, long ago, to kill out nature's agents, the red grouse, as we delight to have it, would never have been evolved. Yet we strive to bring about a condition of things in which it will be no longer needful to have russet hues for hiding. Nor will all the wit of man stay them from fading, or put them back where they were. As a painter without his brush, the moor will show its helplessness in the absence of living agents. From its own palette the heather will not lay on a single hue. Reversion will set in, and charm will go. The true enemy is not the eagle. But it is not all tinting. Something else is in the conception of a bird.

The falcon seeks game mainly on the wing. She loves the stern chase, the lofty air perch, the swift and fatal stoop. There is reason in shooting the falcon. How mean and unsportsmanlike the reason will appear. She exacts her toll from the moor. Of a covey of grouse, she will have one. Which one?

Some say the weakling; that which lags, because it may not keep pace with the others and falls an easy prey. A plea has been urged for her on this very account. For are not these weaklings most likely to contract infection—if not already victims of incipient disease—and spread havoc among the rest? It is good that the devastating career should be stopped. And is not she the physician of nature?

I am less disposed to make use of this than once I was; partly because I see something better that may be said. It is based on imperfect observation, and still more faulty appreciation of larger issues. Pity if it were true, seeing that it would involve more loss than gain. There are birds—I know a few—possessed of the passion of flight,—that strain on the wing for the very joy of putting forth their energies. There are birds of prey which rejoice more in the pursuit than the capture. All have a liking for the chase. The rarer like it well. The rarest of all is the peregrine. Its sporting qualities are matter of history and tradition. It is too late to blacken its character.

That she—for the female is the falcon—will strike unworthy fugitives, with none other in sight, is true enough. But he, who has seen her turn contemptuously away without taking the trouble to kill, will not suppose that she prides herself in the deed. In a covey, with the strong

birds straining before, to say that she will stay her career at the laggard is altogether to mistake her mood. The one fitter than the rest is the falcon's aim. If this be crime then she is guilty, but we respect her the more. She is a noble criminal. On the whole, I do not think that the falcon deems grouse worthy quarry, or is seen at her best on the moor. There are arenas of greater stress, birds of nimbler flight.

Grouse rise heavily before the sportsman—so heavily as to suggest a startled effort to escape that way when no other seemed open. It may well be so. Flight itself may have come into being, as a refuge from ground enemies not to be distanced, or outwitted, on the level. Wild creatures would not take to the wing without stimulus; nor apart from some such use would flight, once attained, have been preserved. Those who could rise above reach, and get along a little way with a flapping motion, would have the best chance of surviving.

When the bird first sprung from the reptile, the air was empty of danger. A lumbering flight was good enough, and would probably have been the highest stage reached. A further stimulus was needed. That came in the form of winged enemies; pursuers in the same element, and of their own kindred. From such are the perfection, and all the marvellous mechanism of flight. To distance the pursuer, a bird had to

put on all its speed. It could put on no more than it had received. But some were quicker than the rest. The slow perished by slow-winged hawks. The quicker survived, to raise quicker broods. And, so the limits of speed were increased. That there might be no relaxing of the strain, no resting-place in the course of evolution, on the track of the swifter was the swift-winged falcon.

Where speed failed, wiles to elude were tried, which test the stroke of the hawk. The pursuer became still more wonderful than the pursued, inasmuch as it had to outfly and outmanœuvre. Flight was moulded, its forward impulse lent, its every subtle bend and graceful curve acquired in this school. If we have thought otherwise, it will be well to unlearn the rustic creed.

What tests the hawk tests also the skill of the marksman. But for such discipline, sport were wholly wanting in zest, nor would it have known the supreme test of a flying shot, or how to meet a tricky flight. Only ignorance can excuse the gracelessness with which this debt is repaid. Such is so much of the story of life in the open as is influenced by these two forms.

If we assume a sculptor, they are the chisel; a painter, they are the brush. They did everything except create. The falcon gave the flight feathers, lengthened and pointed the wing. The eagle touched the plumage with moorland hues,

whose charm was the greater because of the exquisite sympathy. The reaction is marked; the eye of the eagle became keener. Even the byplay is of infinite interest. The protective shades of grouse give the nose of the pointer; less cunningly hidden, and a coarser sense were enough. An interesting three are grouse, sportsman, and dog. The hawk established their delicate relations.

Time was when people minded these things. If they did not think of them quite in this way, the result was the same. They let Nature alone, as old enough to manage her own affairs. The love of mammon and all unrighteousness was not yet awake. With the instinct of fair play, which is the vital spark of sport, they gave each a chance. Their little differences they let the wildlings settle among themselves, and found it greatly to the health, and altogether to the joy of the moor. More clearly does this come out now that there is little health and less joy. It gave the detachment from butchery needful to make it a recreation for gentlemen.

Old servants stayed with their olden masters, and it was found to be good for both. The lesson applies to the moor. That the old servants there may be turned off without loss is not the case. Looseness will slip in, and want of sympathy; with attendant risk and ultimate decay. The loss may well be by littles, but so was the gain. The

present generation of sportsmen may not see the undoing, neither did they see the doing. In their last season grouse will be shaded, as they were on the first.

Nature never alters her ways, either in the giving or the taking. She is wondrous kind even to the renters of moors; she shows so little at a time.

Nor will new servants fill the place of the old, in the open any more than they do in the house. The eye of the gamekeeper is nothing to the eye of the hawk. The two do not mean the same thing. The one has a narrow, the other a far outlook. One works for his employer, the other in the interests of the moor. The one is there to keep the birds wild, the other to make them tame.

And tame they will become; by degrees, perhaps, but steadily. Half the wildness of wild creatures is a continuous fear and watchfulness; half the tameness is to have no enemies. Disturb the balance of nature, and you have no nature in either scale. The falcon which strikes the fittest, points on to a fitter still—an ideal beyond. In her absence is reversion to the reality behind, barely covered out of sight. Kill her and with the same bullet you kill the grouse as you know it, and arrest sport.

Straining after the leader of the covey she appeals to chivalry and every sportsmanlike

instinct. Between the shooter of large bags on easy terms and the peregrine, the bird has the truer spark. She loves sport for its own sake, and seeks to win in a fair heat. The bird, which by reason of speed or resource escapes, she probably respects, and will measure herself against some other day. Her appetites are secondary; her sporting instincts dominate. She prefers the sauce of chase, and the more piquant the better. She will leave a languid capture in midmeal at the challenge of some nobler quarry.

From Sutherlandshire, the report, 15th January 1898, was that golden eagles abounded over the county, being preserved by the Duke. Falcons were to be met with. No word of protection. No change has come about since. Eagles are increasing, not falcons; and that where the proprietor is humane and the policy liberal. So it is all over Scotland, protection of the golden eagle, except where the illiberal or inhumane kill both. Always the falcon that is left to her fate. One is sometimes tempted to wish that it were the other way.

In all but size, the falcon is the nobler. She is neither so loose nor so lumbering, nor so gross of appetite, nor so indifferent, where and how she finds her prey. In the golden eagle appetite is first, the sporting instinct is absent. Within limits he may have his preferences. Mountain hares are more easily seen than sitting, and more readily

caught than flying game. Should there be a dying lamb, or the carcass of a sheep about, even the mountain hare is safe for the day; he will gorge himself. No love of chase for its own sake, nor sense of fair play, nor trace of chivalry, is there. For the rest he is sullen, cruel, and treacherous.

The falcon has the better part, utterly without grossness of habit or any meanness of spirit. Proud is she, almost to haughtiness. A wonderful picture of wild life is that where she lands on the ledges of rock over her captive. Impatience is in the act of twisting the neck and tossing the head away. The talons relax, the keen eyes flash as a swifter wing comes in sight. And with her sterner qualities, she is gentle and tractable, so that she will sit on a lady's wrist.

Chivalry in feathers appeals to knightly men; this sporting bird that would rather a long chase than an easy capture, rather a swift wing than a fat meal, appeals to all true sportsmen. For the rest—whose spirit is different—possibly she despises them as she does the mean among birds, and when she receives the bullet casts an undaunted look down on the shooter.

With her clean habits and disdainful mood, she does not readily succumb to the vulgarity of a trap, or the cunning of a bait. She will starve before she will stoop. She may be shot, but she will not be tempted. Therefore the frequent

reports from the remoter districts, 'Peregrine common, though destroyed when seen.' Like enough is she to hold her own and return, if not the same, then another peregrine, till men's eyes are opened to the colour of their actions. The falcon for a looking-glass may help them to see their likeness.

Only fixed at the nesting time, even then she chooses a lodgement for her brood, wild, often inaccessible, a fit background for her and their picturesque personality. No more exhilarating sight is there than the young falcons in their nest on the giddy ledge, looking boldly out on the dwarfed glen or silent surf. Fearless, they will strike at the man swung over from above, on a rope.

Only the other day some of the more offensive of the tourist cult, after tormenting some ravens, found a cleft or goat track by which they could approach an ærie. In vain the old birds sought to divert or daunt them. The falcon shot, the less bold tiercel withdrew. These out of the way they reached the nest, and threw the young into their game sack. It is not pleasant to think such things are done, that such gunners should be allowed to kill nobler creatures than themselves. It has an ugly resemblance to other kinds of shooting, and should teach to shun the very appearance of being one in such a fellowship.

On putting aside the gun, one may lay the

flattering unction to his soul that, after all, no great harm has been done; not in such a short life as ours, no very apparent harm. A dying sportsman should seek a cleaner record than that. He should be able to say—I have meant no harm, I have done no unfair deed, taken no mean advantage, spoiled no other creature's play. Were I to live it over again, I see nothing I should care to alter.

Photo. Chas. Reid

THE GOLDEN EAGLE

III

WILD CAT, MARTEN, AND POLE-CAT

IT is now many years since that most robust of naturalists, John Colquhoun, deplored the disappearance of the wild cat from the Highlands. He knew it well, in all its feral panoply. He describes it minutely, and from the life. In his breezy "Moor and Loch" is a presentment, not quite up to the standard of modern illustration, of the largest female ever taken in Dumbartonshire. There it appears grey, rough-haired, regularly striped, big-headed, square-jawed, and generally forbidding. The tail longer than, though not so thick as, that of the male. The pose crouching.

And on the authority of those who cannot be sure that they have ever seen a real wild cat alive, we are asked to believe, that several, bearing every point, and fitted to take the place of the Dumbarton cat on the page, are still prowling about. Some of them are even exhibited, to the delight of the curious, the majority of whom can scarcely be well enough informed to have an

opinion. If John Colquhoun could revisit scenes he knew and loved so well, it woul interesting to hear what he had to say. M has happened since his day to make it only probable that the specimens are, to say the l of it, doubtful.

The rush for grouse moors set in. The bition for big bags reached the acute st Decades passed of steady merciless killing-o "vermin." In the annals of wild life, if eve take a more generous view of wild creat these may yet come to be known as the yea the persecution. Of that more anon. Such are conditions under which increase is possible survival likely. Plainly the assertion of the appearance of the wild cat in numbers asks careful inquiry, and, perhaps, some other planation. It is of the nature of resurrection, these are not days of faith.

The state of the wild cat in the wood is c plicated by the presence of a tame cat in house. In so far, the case is singular an creatures of prey and peculiarly interesting. domestic cat of the keeper, or crofter, going of a night—as cats are wont to do, especially w there is caterwauling in the surrounding wil met one of its kindred, nor were they so far a that they should not mate.

This must have been going on for a very time, since domestic cats are not a thing

yesterday. An occasional thinning of the tail in the trophies of the trap told the story. So long as the wild cat was strong in numbers mating would be less frequent, and the results quickly cast out. The more deeply fixed characters of the wild strain would resist change, the commanding influence of a wild environment would protect its own.

With the killing would result a very different state of matters. The relations would alter, the balance would tremble to the other side. When the wilds held only one solitary bachelor to caterwaul on the edge of the shades, and the nearest tame cat was in the next croft a mile or two up the glen, mating would be freer. The falling off in the wild strain would put the tame cat in possession of the future. Where were ten house-cats for each wild one, the tame strain would have the advantage. When the proportion reached twenty it would dominate. No further power would remain to cast out the results. The cross would persist in the woods; it would increase in the houses.

A passer-by, who stooped to pussy, basking at some Highland cottage door, met with a decided objection to being stroked. There was a lowering of the ears, an opening of the mouth, a drawing out of the eyes, and other signs of wild nature. A keen eye could tell the source, apart from the fact that the domestic cat, purring alongside, blink-

ing in the sunshine, and looking altogether so meek in comparison, had a claim to the maternity, and was at the rearing.

The wild blood would incline some of these to a feral or semi-feral state, or at least make them like a wild flavour after the drowse of the day. They would steal out on the edge of the mirk to return with the dawn, and finally not to come back any more, until brought in by their unsuspecting master as spoils of the trap. In the case of the wild cat being the female, the kittens would be reared outside by their savage mother in the same litter with some that took after their domestic father.

For a time must have lived in the Scots wood this intermediate order of crosses, some of them approaching nearer than others to the feral type. Gamekeepers trapped these, and inasmuch as their knowledge of the points was not very exact, called them wild cats. Experts pronounced on them, and naturalists, who come midway between, procured specimens. Then as now, and with very much greater reason, there may have been a tendency to pooh pooh the absence of the genuine wildling.

While the wild blood surged at half flood in the cottage brood the supply would be maintained, even when the woods were being cleared. Wanderers beyond the fence would fill the vacant place. As in their turn they were captured, others

would come forth. A female might choose to have her young among the forest leaves instead of in the snug basket in the kitchen. At any time a wild cat might be had for a consideration, caught in the wilds, too, so that there should be no mistake. In the dearth of captures an enterprising crofter might have obliged the curious from his own fireside.

The era of the crosses passed, as that of the true cat had done. Pussy no longer wore the feral panoply, nor put down her ears, nor sent sparks from her eyes, nor of a night did she seek to masquerade as a wild beast. She went forth in her own slinking gait and sleek coat, faintly scintillating in the dark. In wilder scenes some may have lingered on. In some remote croft may remain to this day descendants of the first cross to hunt the surrounding woods. This seems not improbable in the light of recent events. But for more than a quarter of a century no wild cat was heard of that would deceive a gamekeeper, bring a wise look into the face of an expert, or tempt a mere naturalist to a breach of the seventh commandment.

A friend, who has just returned from the north, tells me that the wilds round where he stayed were infested by cats. A chance shot was all that was tried for a while, till the visitation reached the dimensions of a plague. Field and covert were harried; fur and feather alike fell

victims. Urgent need arose for more drastic treatment. Guns went out, and among them they had an excellent bag. Some were known to have returned to the houses. Some drowsed away the day in barns, and some were nomads. Nothing that was not common; no trace of a wild strain was in any of them. Yet wild cats were once there, and half-wild cats. If an extreme instance, this is sufficiently representative. To such through two gradations have come the old denizens of the wood. A probable condition for any future for the wild cat, say by reintroduction, would be an abatement of this nuisance—a tax on cats, as on curs.

A few years ago I tried the only way of finding out the hold, if any, the semi-wild cat had in Scotland. If yet abroad, the person who saw or trapped or shot them must be the gamekeeper, or, at least, he was sure to know. I therefore wrote to the head keeper of all the important estates throughout the Grampian range of Forfar, Perth, and Aberdeen; and no one of them all knew of either presence or capture. The reports are beside me now.

Each cat makes itself felt. Each pair would breed. For each season five young would be added. Unmolested, because unknown, as they seem to have been, they would increase indefinitely. All the more strange that they kept out of sight. All the more convincing the

general testimony of their absence. If cats there were, then, at the distance of a quarter of a century, we should expect, not half a dozen, but legions. Each estate must have enough to restock the Highlands.

Some of these men had a record of thirty years' service. Others had gone from one place to another, and knew the Highlands well. The crosses, which they were unlikely to be able to tell from the true wildlings, had passed before they came into office. No doubt domestic cats were shot and trapped. Of these the keepers said nothing; no tale could be made out of them.

Ousted from the central range, the cat retreated north and west to the ruder scenes of Ross and Sutherlandshire, where preservation was less strict. It was found there at a later date. I tried to follow it up, if by any means I could come on fresh spoor. The pursuit was belated. The footprints were blotted out, the scent cold. It was long since it passed that way. Like every one else I was interested in Charles St. John, alike for the charm of his personality and his delightful narrative. Of all naturalists he is perhaps the most attractive. The scarcity of birds on the way to Scourie he attributed to the number of wild cats, some of them, probably, crosses.

For years no wild cat had been there. At Tongue on the rocks were many wild cats.

Naturalists and keepers alike—whose business or pleasure it is to know about the wild life—tell me that their haunts are empty. Like the osprey, once a spark of beauty in the adjoining lakes, the wild cat lives only in the fascinating page, where happily it will pass a certain charming immortality.

Still to the north and west, on the path of retreat, is the varied line of rocks seen from Durness. The cliff called "Far Out Head" is very nearly, if not quite, as northerly a point as Cape Wrath. The caves seem to offer a safe refuge to fugitives from extermination. An old and trusty keeper of Durness, Ewen Campbell, has trapped wild cats, but not for a long time.

A keeper showed St. John an immense cat, bred between a tame and a wild one. The cat of another keeper had a great antipathy to strangers, not suffering himself to be caressed or indeed scarcely to be looked at. These represent, in Sutherland, the semi-feral cats of the crofts and lodges of the Central Highlands, and were probably duplicated in the woods.

Where the proprietor took an interest in the wild life of his estates, I addressed myself to him. Nor had he any other account to give. The Duke of Sutherland says the wild cat is almost extinct. He might have said altogether, since Ewen Campbell knows nothing about it.

One of my authorities for the west coast was the late Duke of Argyll. An intelligent steward

of his possessions, and an interested observer, he knew his Argyllshire and much that lay beyond. No creature could be there that he did not hear about. "Wild cats all gone, but within my memory." This was written to me on the 30th April, 1895. His memory dated back for sixty years.

In the time of Colquhoun, roughly the middle of last century, the wild cat was fast disappearing over the Grampian range. The concurrent testimony of the Duke of Argyll bears much the same date for the west coast. There were giants in those days, and such were the giants. Small men living in corners might correct some of the details. But it is usual to rely on the great authorities, as in the main right.

And though it lingered on in Sutherland, it was only for a while. Ewen Campbell, living in the latest district of the north-west, the vanishing area of our wild life, takes the dearth back for more than a quarter of a century. One meets with those who have heard of a forest, which still retreats on the approach. Such are unprofitable. Safer far to listen to reticent men, who keep within their experience.

One of life's little ironies, chiefly affecting naturalists, is the eagerness to secure trophies of vanishing or vanished forms, with a view of proving that they are still alive, and to take it as a personal insult if the genuineness be called

in question. It is always safe to doubt when this craze is on, and to hint that the very doubt shows that it is time for such dear friends of the wild animals to cease gathering trophies. It has come to this stage as between the naturalist and the wild cat. In any case the supply cannot be very large. It should be plain to the meanest understanding that where so many are being turned into skins—for the benefit of the lovers of life, who are so nervous lest they should be left without—if not extinct now, they soon will be.

One would like to believe in these specimens, not for the benefit of the collectors, but for the sake of the faint hope that they represent the untrapped which may yet be saved. Happily, their minds are made up, and one has less hesitation in hinting at a possible delusion.

For eager antiquarians is always a market in relics. So in natural history. The supply will be as perennial as the ignorance of the trapper, the credulity of the collector, the infallibility of the expert. Were it true, the traffic should be sharply stopped. As it is we can only wish the purchasers joy of their bargain. It will not be the first time a stuffed goose has passed for a swan.

There are no domestic martens to wander out to the woods of a night, there to meet and mate and raise a half-wild progeny under the shelter of the cottage roof. No crosses, therefore, to

hide away for a while the vanishing of the old strain. The case is simple. There are not even two—the pine and common martens—as was once thought, living under somewhat different conditions, and with a double chance of survival. There is but one species, and when it has gone the end is reached. The way to perdition may be one way. The pace may be slower, but it is exceeding sure.

Where is the ingenuity of the lawless but interesting gentry of the midnight raid? Is not the triumph of human wit to turn to account the instincts of wild creatures, just as science makes use of the forces of nature? Why does the poacher not train the marten to ascend and bring the quarry down from its perch on the branches? Less clumsy this than the gun with its betraying crack! If it be said that they are unteachable, the answer is at hand, and will be given by and by.

The marten keeps a little behind the wild cat. One comes upon fresh footprints, hears something more definite than rumour. Scarce a mark is there in the Central Grampians, or whisper of its presence. For Argyllshire, it is bracketed with the wild cat as "gone but within my time." Its date seems to have been somewhat later, its numbers dwindled more slowly.

On the track through Sutherland, where, in 1848, St. John found them so to abound, the live

animal just keeps a hold. A sinuous form is occasionally seen to cross from covert to covert; the remains of the feast tell of the depredator.

At a pace midway between that of the wild cat and the marten, is the polecat going to extinction. Some say there is defective observation here: it is really the marten that is going faster. A question of much the same purely speculative nature as which of two rabbits the cook put first into the pot. Any interest it has will pass when the hindmost follows. Such records as have been sent to me seem to bear out that the polecat has a slight advantage in the pace.

From the Central Highlands, from Argyllshire, and the west it vanished about the same time as the marten. In Sutherland and the north-west—the only district left for comparison—it is the rarer. Where the other lingers it is unknown. "There are no polecats in my district and neighbourhood. I have not seen one for ten years. There are still a few martens." So writes, from Scourie, an old gamekeeper who knows more about the wild creatures there than any man living. In the more inaccessible parts of Durness, it is hard to get beyond rumour. Ewen Campbell talks of the marten as a form of the past: no word whatever of the polecat.

Unlike the marten, and like the wild cat, there is a tame foumart, in so far as any creature can be called tame that has ever in it something

dangerous. The instincts of the polecat are turned to man's use. In the ferret, the species may be perpetuated long after the native wildling has gone. Ferrets escape, though not often, in the same district, as a pair. Put into the rabbit hole, they stay there; and baffle the digger in the labyrinth of passages. If unlikely to occupy the vacant haunts of their darker kindred, they will be preserved in the interests of sport.

The marten, which yet lingers, is irrecoverable when gone, and should be looked to without delay. The polecat will live on as the ferret; if not in the wilds, then in the shelter of some shed, and under the care of the keeper. Though denied a wild life, in captivity it will preserve its wild nature. As for the wild cat; why the wild cat will continue so long as there is a tabby.

IV

THE YEARS OF THE PERSECUTION

"I HAVE determined to keep my hands free from extermination. The marten and wild cat are not banished from the shaggy woods and rough braes of Sonnachan and Barbea." So the olden sportsman, who rented his first moor as far back as 1822, entered the strong protest of personal example against the ways of the new lessees who were invading the Highlands.

One against a crowd of exterminators, with his back against a rock on behalf of the native wild creatures. And willing to be treated as an eccentric for his whimsical forbearance. This man died, and no one filled his place. Those who laughed at him had it all their own way, blighted the hills—for which, not being to the manner born, they had no natural or traditional care—and, generally, had their money's worth.

Needs but to look around to see the type—the man of commercial instincts, who has rented a moor late in life, and takes thither the maxims

of the counting-house. His son, who practises from behind mock butts, at grouse set free from traps—a fitting school for those without sporting instincts, with no innate love of hill scenes or wild life, in whose hands money alone has placed a gun to work mischief. And, having knocked over the needful percentage to qualify for serious work, the *enfant terrible* shifts behind a real butt, and shows his skill on the birds, driven up to him by an army of hirelings.

Under such auspices, whose blight, unfortunately, fell on those who ought to have known better, the killing waxed in virulence. Each creature not a grouse was a *bête noir*. Mercy was neither shown nor asked. Not asked, because wild creatures do not whine, but take the billet within the bullet, and die, free and bold-spirited, as they have lived. And the mournful conclusion seems to be, that the work was done only too well.

A correspondent remembers a marten at Barcaldine, in Argyllshire, being thrown on the hall table in 1865–6. That is a long time ago. What matters fifty, forty, or thirty years? Certainly nothing to the marten. The vital part was the killing out, the throwing on the hall table of what was so much more interesting than that for whose sake it was killed. This feeling seems to have been present in the writer, who personally inspected with boyish curiosity something

out of the common. It was one less. Other hall tables had the same burden. And so from district to district was the marten wiped out.

In 1883 one was seen in Faskally Wood. Where is it now? Wandering, doubtless, in denser shades, where, by a law of compensation found in most things, it may be hunting its earthly hunters, or waiting for such as are still busy here. Are any abroad in Faskally Wood to-day? If so, is it intended that they shall remain? Of creatures—once found anywhere—to surprise one in Barcaldine, and another in Faskally, at an interval of eighteen years, only intensifies the desolation over the rest of the land and the barbarity of the persecution. No vandalism is ever so thorough that it leaves no ruin, and the ruin certainly does not lessen the sense of the vandalism. Is it not needed to aid the imagination? One would rather not rake up instances of how many the shooters—notwithstanding their training with the gun—have missed, to modify the indictment.

At Knoydart, in 1898, a keeper had six skins, taken from animals trapped during the preceding winter. "But being aware," says a distinguished naturalist to whom they were shown, "how surely the progeny of the homely tabby reverts to the native type in size, in the shape of the tail, in the colour and quality of the fur, I suspended judgment." Is it right to talk of reverting to the

wild type unless the wild strain is already present? Assuming it would thrive, wholly undetached from a house, the tame cat might at a very long interval, and by a process of selection, acquire a thicker fur and a certain protective shading. That is not reversion.

Crossing is a much shorter process. A keen observer says that the tame cats most given to wandering are those which resemble the wild ones in colour. A very different thing from going forth and straightway changing the hue. And may hint at some of the strange weaving, in the web and woof of wild and tame. Not unlikely the roving house-cat owes to an older rover the colour which it is now taking back to the domain of one of its ancestors.

The following winter Knoydart produced a brace of heads. On the evidence of certain bones of the skull, an expert in South Kensington pronounced the bearer, when in life, as indistinguishable from pure *Felis catus*. The opinion is hasty though, doubtless, orthodox. The immense house-cat, seen by St. John, showed certain peculiarities of its wild father's race, not only in the shortness and roughness of the tail, but also in the size and shape of the head—in other words, the bones of the skull.

The expert, therefore, might be quite right and at the same time quite wrong, orthodox without being true. An expert may narrow his

horizon to make sure of his facts, and keep to one side in case the other should contradict him. He may know the points of a wild cat without being familiar with the conditions of wild life in Scotland, by much the more important factor. Had the Sutherlandshire cat been sent he would have called it a wild cat, if only it had been concealed that it came out of a keeper's lodge. No one, not even he of South Kensington, will assert that a cross may not have its father's head as well as its father's tail. The reason why tail and head alike were in northern croft and lodge is just this curious juxtaposition of allied species. If now they are found in the wilds, it is because the persecution has given a predominance to the domestic strain, which has not been persecuted. In this is nothing strange when we know all the facts.

It may be assumed that these six Knoydart skins were not of tame cats, and it is fairly certain that the two skulls tell of a wild ancestry. The point at issue is whether the wearers, when in life, were more likely to be true or crosses. One of the unhappy outcomes of the persecution is, that the most liberal of landlords has not the satisfaction of knowing what he is harbouring.

A timorous correspondent fears that to throw doubt on the genuineness is to lessen the interest, and so endanger those that are left. No good ever came of feigning blindness to facts, nor cure

from physician who persisted in seeing health where was none. I did not make the situation. The peculiar mischief wrought, and the vague uncertainty being left behind, are none of my doing. My wish is to point out the double agency of destruction which persecution lets loose—the blight of crossing on the doomed species. To rejoice because a few wild cats—granting them true—are found here and there amid a legion of tame cats is to live in a fool's paradise. Either something like the old predominance will have to be restored, or they will have to go out at the one door or the other. I deserve better than blame, even from the optimist, whose natural history may be getting rather musty, for providing him with fresh matter for curious speculation.

By all means give space and liberty to breed and gather. If one man has resolved to keep his hands from killing, to make the cat and the marten free to the rough woods of Knoydart, nor grudge them their share, I cry "Bravo!" No harm will come from the charge of whimsical forbearance on the lips of those who are not like minded, nor worth minding, save for the mischief they do. There may be still a chance of some of the old strain. Even if not altogether wild, they are the nearest we can now get, and that is something. Under wild conditions, the bent will be toward the wilder ancestry. A modified persecution that

is only short of extinction is vain. The other agent will take the matter up, and bring it to an issue. Satan will be found in the person of tabby purring on the doorstep.

Two cats were captured near Invergarry, in Inverness-shire, and now form part of an interesting little live collection at Kingussie, the capital of Badenock. Fierce and strong enough, they broke through the wire investment, killed so many rare fowl as to wreck the collection, and made their escape. Traps were set. With their usual fearlessness, they took the bait, and were brought back to confinement.

As a domestic cat cornered by a terrier, so they growl and spit, and flash a fierce light on all who approach. Any cat that had led a wild life, and been brought in when grown up, would act in this way. Man is the terrier dog. On an authority, which one strongly hesitates to gainsay, these are said to be genuine wild cats.

I certainly have no desire to play the sceptic. Were my interest in the wild life of the land not so great I would not write. I am inclined to look on these captives with a friendly eye, half ready to be deceived. Only one or two things occur to me. Crosses might present all the appearances of these cats. It is the uncertainty that troubles. The appeal is not conclusive. Wild cats should be in a strong body if they are to remain pure. And where is the strength to

MACFARLANE'S WILD CATS

be found. Probably, too, domestic cats would have to be weak; and they are strong.

Manifestly these cats are rarities, otherwise why make so much of them? If there are many more, methinks "the lady doth protest too much." Whence arose the two in the empty woodland, where only the ghosts of their forefathers walk? When a wild animal in the centre of its ancestral domain is kept captive, the case is hopeless. If these are genuine wild cats—where is so much obscurity, the only two known in the land—why not turn them out? Is there no bid for them? Can no landlord be found who will give them the run of his place? If not, why talk of the wild cats of Scotland on the strength of two barred in a cage?

If such considerations do not appeal to those who are already convinced, I can only quote a testimony which, in the view of the man in the street, will outweigh that of an expert. I am asked to account for six skins, two skulls, and two live animals, together with the assertion of many more where these came from. Writing, some fifty years ago, when the strain was still strong in the land, John Colquhoun says:—

"I have spent a great part of my life in the most mountainous districts of Scotland, where killing vermin formed the gamekeeper's principal business, and often my own recreation. I have never seen more than five or six genuine wild

cats. I have seen no less than thirty naturalized wild cats, trapped in a year on a single preserve; some of them might have been mistaken for the true breed. They were, in fact, a cross between the wild and the tame cat."

Six wild cats seen all over Scotland, in a lifetime, against thirty crosses in a single forest in one year! What chance that the wild cat survives. To which group are those said to be abroad in Knoydart and other woods likely to belong?

Since the days of such scant gleanings, fifty years have done their utmost to make a clean sweep. It is no fault of the persecutors that any have escaped through the hairs of the brush. Nor is there any very general abatement in this relentless work. The whimsical forbearance of some individual proprietor, whose authority ends with his fence, is interesting rather than important. Impotent then, it is no more potent now. Whim and generosity, charming as they may be, are not lasting, and, while they last, are very much on the surface. They are not exactly what is wanted.

I hold no brief for these two creatures nor plead for special treatment. The wild life of the land must stand or fall together. Other mammals —only second, if at all inferior, in their natural claims—have suffered. Trap and gun have been busy on them also. If they are not nearer the

end, if some are still dominant forms, it is not through any forbearance, but that they have a genius for looking after themselves.

Among birds the slaughter has been great, the victims the noblest, the motive a few more grouse. The following are of those denied the right of existence, save in the woods and wilds over which Colquhoun had control. The golden eagle built in Glenlass, so did several peregrines on the wilder cliffs.

In the same pine-wood the merlin was constantly flushed. One can scarcely credit the ignorance which would slay a falcon so tiny, charming, and high-spirited, which robs no nests, kills on the wing, and lives mainly on titlarks. Nor the absence of fineness in him, who had no care for the lady's hawk—when outdoor life had elements of charm and picturesqueness—which has fallen on evil days. Sport, like everything else, is bare when it has no history, no regard for living relics, no sense of backward perspective, no trace of old-world gallantry. For the sake of her sister who loved the merlin, woman should take it under her charge. It is hers to shorten the reign of ignorance and prevent the doing of dark deeds. It would not be too much to ask for the life of one bird; and the merlin might repay her the debt. A merlin on a lady's wrist, even in these prosaic days, might still be worth the painter's brush. In the absence of gentle patron-

age, the merlin, like the peregrine, will continue to owe its existence to its own resourcefulness.

"I have myself in one season seen three nests of that sylvan ornament—the kite." In other woods than Glenlass was the same happy abundance. One would search in vain for the wilds where were three nests, and with scant hope over many wilds for even one. It nests but in the memory that goes furthest back, or in the tale told of olden days. From the worn seat on the village green of an evening, the peasant might watch the slow wheel on motionless pinion so high that it seemed scarce larger than the lark. It did no harm; but ignorance invents. One never sees, seldom hears of the kite. Nowhere is it more than extremely rare. No longer does it appear on the gamekeeper's gallows-like row of examples; so effectively was the work done by those who went before. As the eagle, so is the kite, a ground feeder, a greedy bird to boot, taking readily whatever is laid down. Its capture is ridiculously easy, and within the compass of the heaviest-witted trapper.

In certain districts a somewhat belated sentiment now protects the golden eagle. Favouritism is always offensive, and we forget to thank those who go on killing elsewhere. That the eagle should be allowed to poise in the heavens by special permission of the proprietor of the soil may be very nice, though it savours of the

largesse of the parvenu. But it is correspondingly ugly that other birds should be denied a like privilege. It is one of the tricks played by "man, proud man, dressed in a little brief authority."

So men blighted this new playground in a rather sombre world, and having found a pleasant plaything therein, proceeded to kill out all that made it pleasant. Of the living forms, many of them strikingly beautiful, all intensely interesting, they preserved but one. It is as though an Alpine were chosen out from the glorious Alpines of our hills, and all the others were rooted up, lest they interfered with its spread. This is not a matter for curious naturalists, with their mild enthusiasm and inconsistent ways; who may be pushed aside.

I can recall a student in Edinburgh, son of a Highland chief, who boasted, rightly or wrongly, that he alone in the university was privileged to wear an eagle's plume. It were another of life's little ironies, if over the ancestral moor the eagle were slaughtered. One sometimes wonders if those whose pride it is to be known by the name of the cat grudge it a share of the spoil, and lease the rough woods and braes to its destroyer. Hear the cry of outraged sentiment: "Is there one mountain-born son of Alp who does not agree with me in preferring our unspoiled glens, our wild game, and our national distinctions?"

Highlanders may have forgotten all that made them and theirs picturesque and uncommon, and

be contented that once vital signs, which brought the proud curl to the lip, should be empty of meaning. The lust of mammon has entered them. Others may be interested if they are not. I should like that the whole matter be placed before the public mind, and commended to a national sentiment. There is so much that seems out of joint, and would not be, if people saw and felt aright.

Notoriously proud of country, a Scotsman should pay heed when all that touches the imagination and warms the heart is being destroyed. In the scale of being, the heather might go, and the Alpines might go before the wild creatures. So surely as they go, the sentiment of country will wane along with them, and all our vapourings will be but sound and fury, signifying nothing. It seems a small thing to sell our cats and our weasels, our eagles and our falcons for gold. It is bigger and more far-reaching than it looks.

A national might be strengthened and, if need be, replaced by an imperial sentiment. If men at home do not care, perhaps there is a more generous soul in those who have gone away. I sometimes think, if they only knew how the wilds are being blighted and the wild creatures slaughtered, so that the land is becoming common as other lands, a voice would come across the water to help us. As much sport as you like, but no murder. Let the years of the persecution cease.

The greater Scotland is now elsewhere—New Zealand, Australia, Canada, even the United States. Men who emigrate go over to the majority. No one is so much a patriot as he who has left his native land behind, nor so longs to find things as they were. If the years of captivity linger, so much more desirable does the vision become, till the heart aches for desire. Less intense, but not less pathetic, and wholehearted his allegiance than that which found utterance long ago: "If I forget thee, oh Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her cunning."

V

HOOF AND CLAW

NOT much of the chalk is left in Scotland. An occasional flint rolling in upon the shore seems to hint at a possible deposit under water off Aberdeen. That and a few patches on the west coast are all. With the chalk my story begins. A somewhat dim phase of geologic time, it was pregnant with great issues in the evolution of life. Archaic creatures enter, to appear on the hither side as forms with which we are more familiar.

In the interval the mammals received their initial development. Among the rest the ungulates may be said to have come into being. In numbers they crowded forth. In vast flocks and herds they scattered over the plains and marshes of a new world. If not exactly as we know them, still sufficiently near to be easily recognized. Their habits were as now. Their share was every green thing, the grass that grows for the cattle.

That they are hoofed animals is diagnostic

enough, but not quite in balance. We give our names at haphazard, or without reference to other names. We might as well call the cats clawed animals. The cats and the cattle—excuse the slight alliteration if not something worse—run in couples, and should be named along the same lines. There is a history and brief chronicle in well-chosen names where one leads on to another. If we called them grass-eaters quite a world of obscurity would be cleared up.

For we straightway come upon the flesh-eaters. Indeed the two were twin-born from the same generalized form. There is a natural fitness in the arrangement, a sequence which we should most assuredly observe. In two groups thus linked, to call one by the teeth and the other by the hoofs is the act of blunderers. The first group eat grass, and so make flesh, therefore graminivores; the second group eat the flesh thus made, so carnivores.

No other two forms have a like significance. No others are so linked in bonds that are indissoluble. These were the two great protagonists. Like other twins, they straightway fell out. There is a sense in which ungulate is not unfitting. Ingenuity can always find a meaning in the blunders of the name-givers, even when it is not the most obvious one. It was a trial of speed against strength; of hoof with teeth. The tragedy of the world began

then. The cry of fear and pain seems to reach us across the æons. These things had been before, but in dimmer and more uncouth forms—the Calibans of creation—which do not touch our sympathies.

As in other matters, the past may be re-created out of the present. A few incidents, once common where we stand, are still enacted elsewhere. In South Africa, for instance, where herds of wary grass-feeders out on the plain are ready to start on the first alarm, while silent carnivores—the lion and the leopard—prowl round the outskirts, or stalk with a certain deadly skill. This discipline has been at the forming of our tame cattle. It helps to explain a hundred little ways they have got, taken by the dull herd as a matter of course, but really dating back beyond Guelph and Plantagenet.

We have changed all that. And here the larger outlines of the persecution are seen, the beginning of the policy which has kept on in lesser circles, and whose working is not stayed. The psychology of the movement is also made plain. The motives which are hidden under so many flattering aliases.

In a sense we are carnivores, though, conveniently for ourselves, we combine the tastes of both. In this we brook no rival, nor are we delicate in our methods of getting rid of those which exist. Our nomenclature here also is

defective, by reason of weakness. Ours is the good old rule, the simple plan that they may take who have the power. We are an aggressive race. We have really no other right to do anything of the kind, no right but might. No right but the weapons we have been able to make, and the excuses we have been able to frame. We do a thing and then include it in a decalogue, shift the responsibility elsewhere. We may assume a virtue, but certainly we have it not. Fine names butter no parsnips, nor do they alter facts. Nor do the commandments satisfy a conscience that is not moulded to order. I have heard the whole matter condensed into the convenient formula that animals have no souls. This is clearly a case of swollen head. An unvarnished statement of the relation is nearer the truth.

We came between the carnivores and their dinner, and having slain the slayer sat down to the repast, upon which we said grace. We killed them out because they persisted in using their canines, and then proceeded to use our own. Before eating we lit a fire to show how cooking alters the moral complexion of actions. We rung down the curtain that the tragedy might be enacted behind; deadened the cry of pain and fear that it might not reach over-sensitive ears.

The sentinel, the false alarm, the short fierce combat—which were at least picturesque and impressive, and half redeemed the ruder parts—

belong to an heroic age. We have no belief in heroics. We seek no arena for our deeds, which might lend them of its own greatness. We act secretly in dark, narrow places. Were we dealing with men we might be said to assassinate.

Even as I write a little group of cattle—the one nearest an innocent-looking brute, with a great disc of white round the eye—are passing the window on their way from the pasture to the town. Behind is a lout, with no special marks of person to commend him as anything superior to his charge. Perhaps the chief advantage is the stick, the original of weapons, the crudest symbol of man's sovereignty.

In his reminiscences, Dean Ramsay tells of a guest in a Scots house who was late in coming down to dinner. Donald, the manservant, sent to find out the reason of the delay, surprised him using an instrument with which he, Donald, was unfamiliar—a tooth-brush, to wit. Still the guest delayed. "But, Donald," said the master, "are you sure you made the gentleman understand?" "Understand," was the retort, "I'se warrant he understands. He's sharpin' his teeth." While the herd was on the way, the town was sharpin' its teeth.

So it is. The great carnivores are extinct, killed by our hands. The grass-eaters are preserved. Not because we love them, save in a very carnal way. The warfare goes on, only in

a less interesting mode, and with a change of one of the combatants. We hide it from others by a sort of common understanding; and from ourselves because we would rather feel virtuous.

While we settle our differences with our fellow carnivores, the ungulates are not spared. They can have no opinion to offer in favour of the change. It can make very little difference to them who eats, so long as they are eaten. An Englishman dearly loves his dinner. A Scotsman does not like to be without. It is our infirmity. We all eat. There is no harm. We were made that way. We should all be less open to criticism if we did not strike an attitude; and compound for the sins of our mouth by the length of our face. In the rough-and-tumble past, we have somehow come out at the top. Had we been under, we might have seen from another point of view. The advantage of a little imagination is, that it helps us to see ourselves from the outside.

One, well known in London, got into a by-path in Scotland. When wending his way up a Highland glen he chanced to meet strange cattle—long-horned, shaggy-coated, some dun-coloured, like the evening light along the slope of the hills, some wan as a stormy gleam on the loch. They were such as Rosa Bonheur would have delighted to paint. To her, they would have been welcome, and looked friendly. In her, they would

have awakened only admiration for their strength and picturesqueness, and a sense how well they became the rude path, and the rough moorland, stretching away to the misty hill tops. Now Rosa Bonheur would never have thought of painting the visitor as a fine animal—which probably he was not—nor as anything else. Scant appeal would he have made to her artistic sense. In indifference or contempt she would have turned away to stroke the dun or wan shoulders.

All is in the soul, or want of soul, that looks. In the new-comer, these children of the wilds excited only fear and trembling, and a sense of danger to life and limb. The long horns and rough coat, which brought the glow to the wandering artist's face, were the panoply of a ferocious nature; the eyes glistening through their shaggy fringes with a wild and alluring light meant mischief, of which he was, perhaps, the immediate object. Barren of the artistic love which casteth out fear, he was craven before these fearless mountaineers. On a fenceless moor, they had all the advantage.

What means he took to secure his safety is not on record; but, on his return home, he wrote to a magazine, protesting against allowing wild beasts to wander in the possible track of innocents abroad. Think of the loss to society if one of them were impaled. Possibly they met under

happier circumstances, for the tourist. Highland cattle do sometimes leave their native wilds to visit Smithfield Market. With his legs under his own mahogany, and his napkin duly spread over his waistcoat, man would be master of the situation.

In the Highlands are other ungulates than the cattle. Sooner or later, in its windings among the hills, the glen would eddy into some stern cul-de-sac, misnamed a forest. The deer pent in there are no longer simple-horned, but antlered. Less formidable than picturesque, the appeal of the head is æsthetic. Little tines or branchlets to the number, it may be, of a score, shoot out here and there. In woodland animals, these might serve for concealment, the tines being lost amid the tracery of the trees. That they are weapons of offence is witnessed by the deadly combats among the stags, while the hinds stand by with the cruelty of gentleness. Moods there are in which the approach of man is made at his own risk.

Morning and evening, when the shadows fall eastward or westward, they come from the high grounds, to feed on the long and juicy grasses by the ash-strip or the burn. Had the fresh or tired tourist turned in that way, he might have seen no cause for alarm. Deer are, in the main, shy, and when disturbed drift away like shadows. A fleeting vision and they are lost, and the glen is

empty, save of the self-created fears of a great solitude.

With infinitely more of the wild animal about them, deer help us to picture the old relations. They have all the resources, all the wariness, all the pristine freshness of sense, of days before the captivity. Scent is exquisite, sight keen. They hold a wireless communication with an enemy coming down the wind, detect a distant movement of the heather tuft which conceals danger. Fleet as the breeze which brings the scent, is the speed of their vanishing. The hoof has the old mission, to bear to some sanctuary, beyond the reach of pursuit.

Little happens in the herds of South Africa that does not also happen in these glens, nothing essential. On the veldt, both sides are serious, that is, perhaps, the only difference. With the deer of the glen it is serious enough. It is all as when the wolf came slinking up, under the shelter of the perched boulder, or, with his long swinging gallop, followed on their track.

The wolf is no more. We resented his interference, and wished the deer for ourselves. We killed him, and took his place. We did not turn the quarry, which as successful rievers we had thus acquired, within the fences, as we do cattle, to fatten for our use. Rather we took a double toll. We sought to preserve the picturesque, the heroic element. We could catch first and eat

Photo. Chas. Reid

RED DEER

afterward. We would kill, not behind doors, but in the open, and under the sky.

Our wit was pitted against the wit of the quarry. We met wile with wile—ambushed, crawled, sought the alliance of the wind, of the sympathetic shading of the ground until we came within distance. We would even choose our body-covering to aid in concealment, as the hair or fur is toned by nature. We would masquerade as wild animals, as carnivores over against the feeding ungulates. There is nothing original in all this. It is a case of reversion, a calling of the underlying wild instincts to the surface.

An element of fair play brightens the series of episodes. We give the deer a chance for its life, which is more than we do for the cattle, only we see that it does not get away, as it might do in a truly wild scene, and from its natural enemies. This interval between the grazing and the gralloching, between appetite and dinner, we call sport. It is a pretty name for a certain usurpation of the methods of the animals we have first disinherited. As in other cases, we adopt without acknowledgment. We deny the name to the manœuvres we copy. We think that sport is the prerogative of man, who has a soul. It is an afterthought. What matter? They are alike. The same wild instincts are at work, with the same pleasure in their exercise.

I have no quarrel with this copy. I like heroics,

even when they are not quite sincere. A very little acquaintance with life tells us that it would be a poor show in the absence of a little illusion. Only an enemy of his race would do away with the staging—what the Frenchman calls the music. Sport has all the charm claimed for it. The interlude makes all the difference between the death of the deer on the heather at the end of a long stalk and the fate of cattle. I have nothing to say in favour of driving.

Thus have we got, not only the eating, but also the fun to ourselves, by the simple process of killing out all that asked a share. We have put out myriad lights that every path, save our own, should be dark. We have a monopoly of the pain and the gladness of the earth. The pain is to others. The gladness may not be all it seems. And, as we have had the making of the decalogues, we have found it easy to prove that this was all right.

These are the days of small things. Our activities are confined to the inner circles. We are busy among the lesser carnivores, which in the absence of any small ungulates find grass-eating prey of another kind. We step in between the weasel or the cat and the rabbit. We are concerned about the warfare of the birds, and rescue the grouse from the falcon. We want the game for ourselves.

We want also the savage pleasure of the pursuit,

or the kill. In so far only as we copy, has sport any meaning. The methods we have added are spurious. It is we who are not sportsmen. In the very act of removing the natural enemies we make the game more helpless, killing easier, and sport impossible.

This may be civilization, but it has a marvellous look of another thing. It seems somewhat of a grim farce. It is well to keep the view narrowed, and the parson at our elbow. I do not know how it would stand a little cross-questioning, or fare at a great assize.

VI

SEDGE-WARBLER AND THE EEL

THE burn is in spate. It swirls round a sharp curve, then sweeps on its course, with occasional eddies. A burn is not a river, nor the miniature of a river. It is to a river as childhood is to maturity. Its changes of mood are sudden. It is volatile. It plays as children play. And this afternoon it is having a fit of temper. It has for us much of the interest we feel in childhood.

It is very brown. The sides fall in to make it browner. The worst is past. Against the far bank the level is sinking. In the gleams of sunshine it is like a child smiling itself back into good humour. A dipper is flying up and down, lighting, for a little, on the alder branch, where it bobs impatiently. Its perch on the boulder is out of sight; the larder at the bottom is closed. It is fain to drop down where the bank softens into a sandy or gravelly stretch for such larvæ as are left by the shrinking water. Though birds like to feed in their own way. Sweeter is that brought

up from the dive. Silver runs—broken and made musical by the gravel—and the clear shallow pools are the natural haunt of the dipper. The northern streams are of this character. Though not a Scots bird, perhaps it gets more of what it needs here, and is most at home. A Scots stream without a dipper were almost a play without Hamlet.

It has its nesting area, where it is found year after year. It may shift up and down the burn a little as winter approaches. It has certain narrow limits of migration. Though often the same pair may keep to their summer quarters all year round; the food is perhaps more certain in the upper reaches. But hard weather makes its own conditions.

A sedge-warbler is either scolding or prattling, or both. The harsh notes sound like scolding, and may well be meant for the stream which has been creeping up the grass stems, floating out the long pendent twigs of the white willow, and coming within measurable distance of its nest. Between the harsh notes is a long string of prattle, much of it pleasant prattle, with some notes very like they had been stolen from our sweetest singers.

Each summer the bird is there, always at the same eddy. It comes in May; it sings all through the lingering twilights of June, and intermittently throughout July. The young flit about with the old, six or seven in all; then they vanish. They

go south, somewhere in Africa. Next year only a pair are in the willows. Does it mean that this is the annual waste of life? Out of every seven only two are left? Or do the young go elsewhere? Over the whole burn one season's warblers are not greater than another. Whence the mortality? It is mainly in the young. Buffeted by winds on the passage, or heedless of risks, do they lose touch with the sage guides of the flight?

This is our Scots warbler. Each patch of marsh lodges its summer pair. On the water-courses which network the land, it is familiar; save only where some wilful bend has left a dry place. I have not yet been where it was absent. So rich in warblers is the south that it may well afford us, who have so few, this one all to ourselves. It has been named the Scots nightingale —not because it sings so well, but because it is our only night-singing bird. The peasant, in the country cottage near where water is, hears it, on his pillow, as a not ungrateful lullaby. From its perch on the willow it catches the step of the late wanderer by the streamside. It chatters to him as he passes, scolding, with its harshest notes, that he is out at such untimely hours. Who has not gone down in the delightful dim coolness just to hear, and could not point out the very turn in the path where the first greeting note will sound; and, when the scolding stopped,

has not sent a little pebble at the bush that he might begin again?

In Scotland, if we boast not the finest singer, we have the most charming setting. What environment may be to a song, and how the sweetest outpourings may suffer in a poor and unhelpful scene, the prince of observers tells us :—

> Soft stillness, and the night
> Become the touches of sweet harmony.
>
> . . . . .
>
> The nightingale if he should sing by day
> When every goose is cackling, would be thought
> No better a musician than the wren.

The magic light of the lanes, the deeper shadows under the hedges, the mystery, the stillness, disturbed only by the passing moth, are all in the song. It is a poor imagination that hears but the sound and finds no space for the rest.

If it be so in the sweet south, how much may the magic of our northern night—drawn out and mystic, and still, beyond the dream of those of other lands—add to the northern night song? Almost enough to make a sedge-warbler's chatter by a Sutherland stream arresting as a nightingale's lay in a Surrey lane.

A delicate lad is fishing. The nervous hand drops the bait just where the burn surges out of the curve. I watch the line in its swift career in the straight run, and round the eddy, where

the tall grasses grow, and the white willow bends. More than once the line surges down. Each time it swirls in the eddy, the sedge-warbler scolds, because its nest is there.

At length is a check. The hook may have caught on something in the bottom. If a bite, it is a slow bite. The angler watches the tremor curiously; so do I. When the strain is put on, it comes away like a twig; and like a black twig it appears on the surface—only it is a living twig. It is an eel which has lived in the eddy where the white willow leaves dip just under the nest, and in a kind of summer comradeship with the sedge-warbler.

It is the penalty for dabbling in brown water; at any time unsportsmanlike. Eels are alive in a spate. The rush and swirl stir up the muddy bottom, and there is so much to eat. The angler gazes helplessly at his catch; it is a yard long, hopelessly hooked and twisted in a dozen coils round the gut cast. The only resource is to make a present of so much as it has swallowed and give it a chance. No use in killing even an eel.

A look of disgust comes into the sensitive face. There is a natural shrinking from anything so snake-like. It is hardly fair. We owe some return. Before I have done I hope to invest the wriggling form with a wonder, absent from its brighter stream-mates. So that next time we

may look with a curious and more kindly eye. The eel will be avenged.

Further fishing is hopeless. The burn swarms with such. Had we not watched them coming up in the spring—myriads of wriggling needles? So many that when they grew bigger the water would not hold them. And what enemy had they, save a solitary heron, or an otter journeying from the water beyond the ridge?

A long-time wonder was where the elvers came from. If the hatching is done amid the gravel, or the mud, why should they not appear singly, or in small shoals, as the trout do? Why crowd up the current in an almost unbroken phalanx from the sea, like travellers who were eager to be at their journey's end? The puzzle was to make a life cycle of the big eels in the burn, and the elvers which appeared so strangely and suddenly in the spring—to fill up the gap between. From elver to eel was a matter of growth; between eel and elver lay the rub.

The rustic had his theory, as he has of all things recondite. So arose folk-lore, and countryside natural history, so childlike, so past belief, and yet so attractive. Hid from the wise and prudent, these charming half-truths or whole fables are revealed unto babes. If an explanation holds the field, so long as it is alone, then the rustic's view had its day. Science might pooh pooh, but could find nothing to take its place.

Say it is unlikely that elvers came from horse hairs, and that the link of connection must be sought in the tail of the steed grazing on the rich streamside grasses. Nor is there any such thing as spontaneous generation. Life comes out of life, and a break means death. That is all negative. How much more can the savant tell?

That the big eels went down stream in the autumn was known. Men forecast the time, and prepared traps which they set facing up current, whence the rush of migrants would come. Before they left, they were seen to pass through certain changes. The eyes grew bigger, so did the ears; as though they were preparing for a place harder to hear and see in; going to deeper and dimmer wastes than the shallow spring burn.

A certain sheen came over them, the promise of something brighter, a faint glory of attire, such as other creatures don on the eve of wedding. Plainly they were bound on a fateful journey, fraught with a faint sense of bliss, increasingly dawning; every stage of which brought them nearer to a promised land. Many wildlings set themselves for the same land; but not so steadfastly, nor over so dim or mysterious a way. So far can we follow, to the kiss of burn and salt wave, where the eel vanishes in the autumn, and the elver appears in the spring. They were going to spawn.

But where? And when? Not near, nor soon.

Spawning was distant, where neither male nor female was ripe. Why, then, start so early, if it be not, that the mating and the spawning were far off, many weeks and long miles away. Thus unripe, they pass out, where the brown of the autumn flood broadens and finally loses itself in the blue of the deepening sea.

The North Sea seemed tenantless. Amid its multitude of eggs and larvæ was no egg nor larva of eel. A little light was thrown elsewhere. The warring currents in the Straits of Messina cast up ripe eels on the shore. It was concluded that they spawned at depths of not less than 500 metres, under great pressure of water, and died in the spawning. But it is a far cry to Messina.

Further progress has been made. A second area has been discovered. To the west of the British Isles, where the water lies to the depth of several thousand feet, was evidence of a great company of spawning eels. The larvæ are ribbon-shaped, and named, from the smallness of their heads, Leptocephali. In one sweep of the net as many as seventy were caught. To the discoverer of this promising area, it seemed as though he had come upon the breeding ground of the eels of Northern Europe.

From the Baltic, from the rivers that rush, the burns which trickle into the North Sea, the descending eels launch out with a confidence that allows of no hesitation. Through the English

Channel, they seek their way to the westerly goal. Those from the more northerly streams may choose the shorter route round the north of Scotland.

Onward they go, with the precision of an army on the march, or a flight of migrant birds, which follow the same route, year by year. By ocean valleys, or along water-dimmed slopes they go. Possibly they join forces by the way, to swell the number of the main body. Of the marked specimens caught at the various stages of the journey, one was found to have covered upward of four hundred miles in fifty-one days.

This little flooded burn is an unconsidered item in the drainage system. Still it has the beginning and the end of the story. So that, whatever takes place elsewhere is gone through here. The eel just put back, if it survived, would—with all the other eels—leave by and by. When they reached where the current met the waves, they would turn to the right, or to the left. Being so far north, they would be likely to choose the left. At the rate of fifteen or twenty miles a day, they would pass up the east coast. In three weeks they would round Cape Wrath. A month later they would reach the deep water and the breeding ground.

There they would shed their now ripened eggs, to float midway between the bottom and the surface—and, having done so, would die. In due

time and order, would come the hatching, and the early larval changes. The needle-like and transparent elvers would start on the momentous journey. They would retrace the way the adults had come—would repass Cape Wrath—coast down the North Sea. And—assuming the young revisit the scene their elders left—arrive some day in March or April, at the mouth of the burn. Thence they would crowd up the current to complete the cycle.

All this is very interesting. But, if a theory is to be tried by its weakest part, then there are one or two weaknesses. There is a marked tendency in some observers to push their little discoveries unduly. Scientific imagination is an excellent thing, meant to span gaps and connect what stand apart, but it must be skilfully used. Were engineers to span chasms so, the structure would collapse. Were business men so to speculate, they would be bankrupt in a week. In the library of science is no place for an Arabian Nights.

The adult eels from the North Sea burn die far out in the Atlantic, and leave their young in the waste of waters. By what means do these young find their way back? Do they come, these fifteen miles a day through the unknown, in the directest route to an unknown destination, by reason of something within that no one understands? Of course, anything is possible. But

this does not differ from the many baseless things which modern thought killed out. Science, it seems, may be a mystery-monger. For my part, I should be extremely hard to convince that an elver could find its way out of the Atlantic, much less round the north of Scotland and into the mouth of an obscure burn.

When the elver grows into an eel, and the autumn flood bears it down to the sea, it may seek the deep waters where it was hatched: it is just possible. More probable is it that a single journey in the elver stage would prove insufficient.

If the breeding ground for Northern Europe is thus out in the Atlantic, some filling up is needful. The story is not quite told. Between the elver and the eel some chapters are wanting. In any case, a mystery does not solve a mystery.

Common sense comes to the aid of a somewhat wild imagination. Possibly all the breeding eels do not die. Enough may be left to guide the young back. Or immature eels may accompany the breeders, and so come and go more than once. Anything seems reasonable, compared with finding a way never before traversed.

Migration is no more than unbroken habit. It is the same in eels as in birds: it is not a mystery. Did all the breeding sedge-warblers die, the young would never leave our land, or, if they did, would not know which way to turn, and surely be lost. The old birds guide; the young

learn the way against the time when they in their turn will be guides. And so the lesson is handed down from generation to generation. If the elvers come back to the eddy, it will be as the sedge-warbler comes to the long grass under the willow, where it has its nest.

VII

HAUNT OF THE WATER VOLE

THE mill wheel has ceased to beat for the day. Swifts are screaming overhead, and sweeping round in their evening play, as though they were near home and had some interest in the dusty rafters. Next to an old castle, the swifts form part of the summer picture of a waterside meal mill. Swallows pass in and out of the door of a low shed, in tireless waiting on an impatient brood under the red slates.

With a restless stillness, midway between motion and quiet, the lade oozes on, confusing the eye that looks too long, and making the head reel. It is not a flow the angler loves: it lacks variety and play. Water-plants root in the muddy bottom, and spread over the still surface. In serried ranks they stand out from either bank. So near in some places is their approach, that scarce two yards of clear flow are left. Detached islets float in the centre. The dull brown of the pond weed is relieved by the green leaves,

starred with the charming white flowers of the water crowfoot.

Trout abound. They fatten on the multitudinous crustaceans and molluscs, which crawl or dart through the shades of the submarine forest. Well cared for beneath, they do not readily take a lure. It is so in all weedy places. They hunt through the dim waterways, feed, and grow lazy, and have no need for more. Slow to rise, they are harder to get on shore. The breaking ring, and the disappearing hook, which send a thrill along the arm and bring the heart to the mouth, are often the beginning of calamity.

A little fish may be checked; but, alas for the larger quarry, which must go to the bottom, and have line, and be tired out; if need be, led down the stream and drowned. No room is there for such play, for the delicate handling, which is the triumph of the angler's art, and gives the advantage to the slender gut. In the scurrying, the line is wound round the submerged stem. The end is not the capture of a large trout, but the loss of a good cast. The baffled angler has the satisfaction of knowing that the poacher—to whose methods the straight banks and smooth flow lend themselves—also is baffled. Every stream breeds such gentry in the adjoining villages. Some shoemaker of pseudo-sporting tastes, or idler with more practical ends in view. If the fly is dropped with fear and trembling, in the half-

hope that the trout will disregard it, the bag-nets can in nowise be risked. Were the weeds removed, the poacher would hear of it next day, and appear next night. Clear of weeds, the stream would soon be clear of trout. Better to bear the ills we have, than fly to others which we know quite well.

From either side, half rings broaden out, to merge in the middle. The bigger trout are rising along the edge of the weeds. They are not all engaged down below. Crustacean and mollusc are not enough. The winged insect has the olden attraction. That grey-winged half-spinner rises a few feet in the air, and, as he dips again to the surface, is engulfed. A fresh series of rings break out. If art could only imitate that dip, and there be no lack in the skill of the maker of the fly! The weeds are so far an advantage. They veil all of the line save that which bears the end hook. Another turn of the reel, or a step back into the pasture field, to get the exact length. Just a yard above where that last fly went down, mine has gone down after it. Either the trout will come out, or to hook it was worth the cast.

Sand martins are scouting up and down, catching, on the rise, those spinners which trout secure on the dip. Between the two is little chance of escape. Both are eager on a grey-blue fly. The bird swerves, as though he meant something, but

does not take the hook. I have caught a swallow, a swift even. The martin is a denizen of the stream and knows its ways. Over the trout it has the advantage of seeing the fisher.

The habit is to feed against the wind, and drifting swiftly back, to return on the beat. In the windless air, the scouting is either way. When it shares the same bank with the kingfisher—known on the stream, but not common—its bore is easily distinguished, in that it is level at the bottom and not pointed for drainage.

Among the sedges, just under the marguerites and the ragged robin, is a water-hen. It moves back a little that the blades may drop together and form a screen. From its vantage, it watches through a slit, betrayed by the sheen of its coral bill. No creature can be so quiet and secretive as a water-hen. Its nest of rough bank grasses is placed among the reeds, not much more than a foot above the surface. In the ordinary stream channel that would be fatal: the first spate would sweep it away. In the lade, any excessive rainfall flows over the wall of the dam. Doubtless the margin is sufficient. The children of the lade seem to know its moods. There is no stiffness in the reeds to support the weight, apart from the buoyancy of the water. The danger is a dry season, when the level sinks. The structure rises from the bottom, and seems to rest on the bent and doubled stalks.

The hen keeps bobbing, nodding its head, and twitching its white tail feathers; all the while addressing me in a low impatient chuckle. When I approach, it runs along the water weeds as a swifter way than swimming. Finally, it follows to see that I am really going. I can see its red beak round the white willow. The cock is invisible; but, from sounds, I know that he aids and abets.

The crisp bite across the grass stem tells a water vole at his evening meal. From the bareness round about, he has been busy for some time; now he attacks the pillar of a nodding panicle, as a beaver might the bole of a tree.

The bank is tunnelled with holes, in little groups, after some plan. The typical number is three. The centre bore goes straight in. From it diverge two runs, one on either side, which open on to the bank, and are of the nature of escape or bolt holes. Beyond the forking is a blind end. The arrangement may be different, or the number greater. A secret entrance opens under the water, when it might be inconvenient to rise to the surface; a hole in the top of the bank gives egress to the fields.

Further up, a second nibbles the mimulus leaves, o'ercanopied by the great yellow blossoms, with the spotted throats. Still another sits amid the white flowers of the pungent watercress. Overhead is a wild rose. The whin-covered

NEST OF THE WATER-HEN

warren of the rabbit, the remote form of the hare, the squirrel's haunt in windy beech or elm, the woodmouse under the sorrel among the woodland shadows are picturesque; but among rodents no environment is quite so fresh and charming as that of the water vole on the stream bank. And this lade is specially charming for the number and purity of its flowers.

So the diet is varied among the plants that grow there. Delightful changes, pleasant or piquant flavours are found by shifting just a little up or down. Only ignorance can charge with any disturbance of the stream life. The shiest trout moves not from its poise as the vole swims past. The true culprit, if mischief be done, we may surprise by and by.

A fourth is on a moist raft of water crowfoot, moored midway between bank and bank. With all the ease and at-homeness of a mouse picking crumbs from the parlour floor, he moves from place to place. His choice is dainty, his actions pleasant to watch, charming are his crumbs. He plucks a flower and holds it for a moment outside his mouth before drawing it in. Then he crosses to the next flower. So he zigzags, culling flowers, and only flowers. And when at length he dives from the edge, the platform he found starred is a mass of dull weeds. Nor is this the whim of one alone. Wherever voles are on a

raft it is the water crowfoot, and all alike take only flowers. It may be that the little lamps of purest ray catch their feeble sight, or some dim sense of the charm draws them. The keeping down of the choking water-weeds is one of the thankless services the vole renders.

All these are young. Like children they keep near home, nibbling about the opening of their holes. In the distance they look black, tending to russet toward the head. Not all quite the same shade. In furring, they may pass through certain transitions, or the voles of a stream may vary. The small ears are quite visible, also the minute eyes far down in the face. The bullet-shaped head is not unlike that of a young otter, for which they are sometimes taken by visitors from the remote city.

The feeding voles on the near side are diving from the bank. The splash is clearly distinguishable from the bell-like rise of a trout. Some keep out of sight, sending ripples in half-circles beyond the floating grass. Now and then one crosses, forming a long, more than half-immersed, moving cylinder. Unless alarmed, voles seldom dive or swim under water. Eyes and ears are hidden by nature's coat. They are much larger than the dark ones by the holes, and further from home. The greyish-brown hue is protective, less easily made out in the grey evening when they are mostly abroad. They are old voles. Crisp

and harsh comes the sound of one feeding among the sedges.

Grey adult and dark young are together. The mother nibbles gravely, moving only far enough for fresh blades. The young is more sportive. In its play it indulges in the squirting motions of a guinea-pig. Habits of play, as well as of graver moods, run through families. So it is with the rodents. It appears even in the rabbit and the hare. They graze and play undisturbed by my near presence; from which I gather that they neither hear nor see well. Only some sharp sound or sudden movement alarms them.

Swimming under the far bank is what might be mistaken for a vole. Many of his deeds are put down to the innocent. The longer tail, pointed nose, beady eyes, and lighter coat mark him out as a rat, and therefore rascal. Any doubt is set at rest when he takes to the grass, and makes off over the field, with the characteristic jumping motion.

At the sluice, lade and stream join. Beyond is a stretch of still water, held back by the dam. In the sluggish iris-fringed deep, food multiplies. Here the trout fatten; hither the fisher comes more than over the rest of the stream. The conditions of success are wind and night, mainly night.

There is no wind, not so much as would lift the down of a moulting chick, or the winged

seed of a dandelion. But night is coming on—a midsummer night. All along the way the sun had a cloudless course. Just after the setting is a shade of dullness; then comes the afterglow. The water reflects the sky with a radiance almost dazzling.

Little trout are rising freely, it is their habit after sunset: a passing sportsman has got half a dozen. They are taking the blue dun. They will take the small fly till ten o'clock. It is a few minutes past nine. I have put on the large moth for night fishing, and am not disposed to change. I have never quite entered into the spirit of those who sum up a night's fishing as catching trout; though I like well enough when the rise is on. So I watch the voles as they cross the water, bisecting the rings of the rising trout by the way, or flop down from the grass, sending half-circles from under the bank.

The characteristic croak comes down from a heron flapping home to the heronry. The notes of a thrush singing midsummer eve vesper in some distant wood die down. The sedge-warbler chatters on. The grey voles are hard to make out. Small trout no longer rise. Yet the gleam refuses to die out of the sky, or from the surface of the water.

Moths, indistinguishable from that on my cast, are flitting about, undisturbed, in the still air, and startlingly visible in the light that blots out all

other life. Attracted by the pale radiance, as of a low burning taper, they hit the face with a palpable impact.

The shadow of the far bank broadens and deepens. Along the edge of the shadow, silent rings break and spread over the water, lit with the fading yet fadeless afterglow. In humpy pasture, the land rises into a broken crest. A belt of saffron sky lies along the purple ridge.

Under this tree will do. No gleam is between it and the far bank. The moth is cast. It vanishes in the uncertain light. No mark tells where it falls; only the taut line will carry it to the edge of the shadow. Still the rings break in circles half eclipsed, and ere the last die down, new rings ripple into being. The trout are busy.

Again the moth is sent to where the ripples are thickest. Night-feeding trout are not scared by the false fly. Only they have a habit of leaving it alone, as they do now. The moth travels between tree and shadow. Meantime, the blue dun, scarce bigger than the midge dancing in the sunlight, is having an offer among the rest.

More frequent is the impact against the pale lamp of the face. Broader and deeper grows the shadow under the bank. At length comes the sullen plunge of a big trout, half caused by the discovery that he has made a mistake. He may have risen out of the water to come down on the lure, and been uncertain against the dull back-

ground. Trout which simply push their noses out are noiseless. The strike touches, but fails to hold him. From some distant steeple ten o'clock rings.

"Will you let me see your fly?" The dweller in the lonely mill house among the trees has come out for the air. There is a fascination in these encounters, in a dimness which blurs the outline and leaves the details to the imagination. He is not very sure of the moth. He prefers grouse and claret, an excellent combination in other things than flies. It is fitting that grouse should be the body, and claret the wings. Every angler has his favourite, and is a dogmatist, whom it is well to humour.

"And now I shall show you how to use it." I meekly hand him the rod. He lets the fly sink as though it were bait, and drift down the slow stream to the full stretch of the line. He jerks it sharply. Then, or not at all, the trout take. "At least it is so in this water, and I know it as well as a man can do, who keeps his rod up, and his cast on for whenever he is in the mood." When the wheel was slowed and the race ceased to plash, little was there to do save fish. A life, vaguely charming, against a dim monotonous background must it be, with no road to one's fellows save the angler-worn pathway by the stream. Very like a vole's life, and his house on the bank might well have been named Vole's House.

"Besides you are too early. I never come out till eleven. Last night, I had a dozen trout between that and twelve." An hour ahead, and no promise of dark even then. The sun would never get into the shadow on this midsummer eve. Day would waken in the east. The dawn would kiss the setting.

A light is on the stream as I pass down, or so much of it as is not under the shadow of the far bank. The restless lapwing screams as he dips from his flight into the dimness of the meadow. If the action is meant to lead away from the nest, he must be stupid indeed to keep it up in the dark. It is hard to tell when he goes to bed and leaves the corncrake in possession, or which of the night calls is the less musical. A dimmer saffron tops the darker purple of the ridge, and passes to the zenith in a pink, flushed, pearl grey. Eleven o'clock rings from the distant steeple. My friend will be bringing out his rod, with the grouse and claret fly, for the night fishing.

The faintest vibration of sound, as from low water bells, tells of the trout rising in the narrow channel. On the crowfoot, lit up with its silver lamps, something moves and puts out light after light. The splash of the older voles comes at intervals, and the dark form crosses the breaking rings to reach the further bank.

VIII

THE NORTHERN ISLES

ONE morning, I landed at Lerwick. My destination was the far north of the island—some twenty-five miles away—which I must reach ere nightfall. There was a talk of a half-way house, and that was hopeful in case of accident. The walk was at once depressing and interesting. It was depressing because of the almost universal pall of peat resting on the landscape; the ragged, marshlike lakes, and the generally uninhabited look. Over long stretches, with the same dark environment, I passed no one.

An old woman came from a miserable hovel—she called it a "peerie," meaning a small house. Her "peerie" cow, allied to the native longhorn, was grazing on the rough herbage of the roadside. It was a scene Dante might have included in his Inferno. Yet she was happy, as she led her sole companion back to their common home, where they lived under one roof, and coughed together in the smoke that found its way, so lazily, through a hole in the roof.

From the sheer walls of cut peat, stuck out branches and trunks of trees, telling that the bare scene had known better times. But that did not improve matters; any more than a tumble-down dwelling does a dreary outlook, or a stranded wreck the seashore. Wearing on for afternoon, the thoughts wandered ahead to that half-way house, which each turn of the road seemed to put so much further away. On appearing, it but added to the desolation.

By the edge of one of a string of marshy lochs, with a background of one of a series of dark peaty hills, it was part of the scene—as depressing, as bare, as inhospitable. A boy brought in a two-pound trout, which he had caught on a set line; it looked dark and forbidding, as though cut out of peat. The lochs, I was told, were full of such trout—a fact I afterwards found out for myself.

Over these hills the Shetland ponies roam; by these dark lochs they drink. They pass along the skyline; they toss their manes; and with dripping lips vanish into the shadow of the peat. No wonder if they are elfish in size, sometimes also in spirit. Other than these was not much by the way. Parts seemed too bare to support life, or make it worth living. Even a wild creature—that asks for so little—would have given up the ghost from sheer ennui.

Previous attempts to naturalize grouse had failed. Within the last two or three years, the

experiment has been repeated. The scene chosen was the drier upland region—the highlands of Shetland—whither I was bound. In 1901, a hundred brace was put down on the Lunnastig Hills, north of the mainland; and a few have found their way as far south as Lerwick. Last year a little mild shooting was done. The gentleman mainly responsible for the experiment is pleased with the appearances, so far as they have gone. A bad season will undo much. A few might drag through to start over again, and so form a link in a chain of disappointments.

With the benevolent view of giving the crofter an occasional dinner of the strange creature—that, when out peat cutting had sought his fellowship from the black forbidding moor, or beat against his dim crusie-lighted window in the height of a Shetland storm—the scheme is amiable. It might even be commended for the adoption of other philanthropists. The want of fences as a preventative to poaching, is felt to be a weakness. But fencing would hamper the free life which moulds the pony. So would one of the most characteristic products of the island be in danger of losing much of its wild grace. Altogether Shetland were better let alone. Indeed only a very good reason can justify the forcing of newcomers on the native fauna. There is always some disturbance of the balance.

And, in the interests of this doubtful experiment,

the evils attending on grouse shooting in the south are being imported. A gamekeeper has been engaged. Vermin are being shot. What constitutes vermin is left to the aforesaid gamekeeper, who is given to seeing it in everything, except the creature he is left to watch. Vermin has not the same range as in the Highlands. The four-footed kind are mainly absent. The falcons and hawks, which lend so much interest and charm to the Shetland fauna, are in danger. In a new place, unhampered by evil traditions, let a new era set in, a new and saner treatment be followed. Then would the experiment not be barren, even if it failed. Let the invading grouse take the ordinary risks. If it cannot hold its own against an enemy infinitely less hurtful than the climate, let that be the test that it ought not to be there. What is needed for survival under unfavourable circumstances is exceeding robustness. If any agent can brace and select, and so create a moorland fauna for the abundant heather of Shetland, that agent is the falcon. Common sense would advise the importation of a few falcons, if there were not enough.

Further efforts to enrich the fauna, and make the northern isles more to resemble the Highlands, are being made. The dark hills must in every detail become modern shooting moors. The white hare is following on the grouse. It is now some time since it came to Orkney. So very

jealous is the proprietor of his possession, that he is said to be killing out the interferers with its well-being and spread. To kill the hawks for the sake of grouse is at least traditional: there is a precedent. To kill hawks for the white hare is new-fangled. But a new broom sweeps clean. In the hare is the comedy of the situation.

Shetlanders are turning their eyes to the mountain hares—one asked through the newspaper where they could be got. How very remote must be that man's dwelling? Why almost anywhere north of the Tay. Many proprietors would be glad to get them taken away. The man who is at all this trouble, and inquires anxiously how they are likely to stand the journey, will be sure to watch over his pets. For the sake of a few hares, which are as common as rabbits, the rare native fauna must suffer. Should the craze spread, Shetland is not unlikely to pass through the dark ages of the Highlands, from which it may emerge at some distant date, miserably poorer.

The way through the dreary environment was interesting, because of what was underfoot. The paving of the Inferno is said to be better than the place itself. I am not disposed to have much to do with stones, in a record of living forms—the matter is too cold and dead. It is scarcely possible to pass unnoticed anything so very striking.

Beginning with the Lerwick sandstone as a base, the road—so far as I can now picture it, and I have passed over more than once—was an object lesson in earth lore. It laid bare the structure of the island, if not also of Scotland. I cannot recall, anywhere else, quite so vivid a revelation.

From under the tilted sandstone, lime cropped to the surface. The way was laid in lime. And by the roadside, where in the south are whinstones, were piles of limestone waiting for the hammer. Anon a stretch of road glinted with mica schist, another glittered with gneiss; still another was golden toned with broken-down granite. The road glitters and glints and passes into gold before me. In the stone-breaker's corner, appeared, in succession, piles of silver or golden sheen.

It was a picture as well as a revelation, this road of varied hue; white or pink with sandstone, blue with lime, silvery with mica or gneiss, golden with granite. A change on some southern roads, so wearisome and headachy in their dusty grey. A stonebreaker in Fife once told me to go a mile further on, and I would see bonnie metal—that man had a soul in him. Straightway the whinstone changed to porphyrite, the grey ceased, and the road was paved with pink. This Shetland road was of still bonnier metal.

On the charming paving I had loitered the day away. Nor was I quite out of Inferno, but only in another part. There was a change, but scarcely for the better. The road entered on a quaking bog, where was a trembling underfoot. Over this boggy land the sun was setting. Though so mild the climate, the relation of day and night approach to Arctic. The midsummer sun sets later than the early-bedding natives. This is already a sleeping land in daylight.

Mist came, or crawled down. The enemy is mist. A slight chill will weave it from the moisture-laden air. The change from day temperature is often enough. There are two typical summer evenings, when the moisture reveals its presence in the rainbow hues of sunset, or a coloured haze scarce less lovely; and when it is grey or black with mist. I learned to know all three. The first lesson was the mist.

The closed curtains deadened sound, if sound there were, as well as veiled sight. Strange chattering voices as of primeval men broke out close at hand; figures loomed large, because undefined. I was in the midst of a family of tramps. They found me lodging for the night; it matters not where.

Such was the end of the bright road that led through Inferno. The mist was the last phase. I issued from it to know the Shetland I have since known and loved; a land sparkling and

alluring. I awoke to its teeming voes and flashing sea coasts.

The stillness had freshened into wind; the mist came down in slanting rain. A wild morning broke. I looked out on the inland-stretching arms or tentacles of ocean. Twice a day, tides from the Atlantic or North Sea moved on the face of the waters; it was infinitely fresher than the black lakes—life for death. Bare heights of glittering schist or red granite rose clear out of the peat.

By the side of one of these northern voes I settled down, with rippling canvas for walls and a roof. It was pleasant to rock out at the flow of the tide, and look over the side of the boat. So amazing was the fecundity of the Shetland waters, especially those that branched, as ours did, from the west. Atlantic tides seemed in the throes of a mighty birth. Life teemed, rolled over life, and disappeared in the mass, to rise again wherever there was room.

And how great the forms were; what circles the jellyfishes made. Aurelia, with its four purple crescents; and Cyanea, with long floating streamers. The colours—the purples, the blues, the browns—in curves, in masses, in lines, against the neutral shades of the umbrella or water, sated, as does the passage of an army.

The lesser medusæ—over which these great forms rolled away inland—when one could get the

net through to bring them to light, were as bewildering in abundance and beauty. One form I remember. It is called after a Swedish naturalist. So minute that it was only revealed to the naked eye through a point of orange or crimson; but so great in number as to form a solid mass in the net. Under the microscope these spots were found encased in exquisite bells.

What sunsets were there. The rainbow broken and scattered on the clouds, the diffused glory of haze spreading a flush of nameless hue over voe and land and croft. The memory comes back on a sigh; the flush lingers on the spirit.

Less sensational, but stranger and more moving, was that which came after; the light that kept fading but never failed; the scene that kept vanishing but only softened its outlines: the lingering northern twilight. The great trout sailed up from the sea with the jellyfish; they leapt around the boat in the evening light; they played by the channels of hybrid lochs, which are landlocked at the ebb, waiting to enter on the flow.

Birds twittered round the tent, where, with a lingering of our southern habits, we were vainly trying to find a softer place on our heather couch, and get to sleep. One must be a Shetlander to sleep in a northern twilight, just as one must be a Shetlander to sit out the long winter dark to the dim crusie flame. One can do little but doze in

the mystic half-light. I saw the shallowness of the sleep, as, in my wakeful moments, I looked on the face of my companion.

Wrens met us, especially where were dry stone dykes, near the scant clearings or dwellings of man. And with that social habit of theirs—which can find but little exercise where so few are abroad—went some distance on our way. Nor is the pleasantness of fellowship confined to them. I imagine the Shetlander in his lonely walk, is not unwilling to have the attendant bird. The place itself extends the bonds of sympathy. I recall a tramp along wild cliffs to a distant voe with a friendly bird. They seemed much larger than our wrens and less dusky shaded. A new species has been made out of differences no greater. Witness the St. Kilda wren. The two are not unlike. Island life and similar conditions may have modified both in the same direction. What little dissimilarity there is may be accounted for by the unlikeness of the two islands. Perhaps I ought to have kept silent, lest it be needful to guard this wren also by a special Act of Parliament.

On the shore, the Arctic tern makes a nest of seaweed. Often the eggs are olive coloured like the nest. As the hooded from the carrion crow, the Arctic tern is distinguished by its range. It is a northern variety of the common tern, nothing more. Where they occupy the same nesting

area they probably cross. Perhaps it would be closer to the truth to say that one grades into the other. In the latitude of the Forth, it is hard to tell whether there be Arctic terns or no. While one naturalist asserts that they abound, another is quite as sure that they are absent. Both may be right, and the truth somewhere between them, as it is between most disputants. It may be a transition area. Eggs are found of all intermediate shades and sizes. I have watched a wiseacre, after robbing the nests, lay them out in two separate piles, when one pile would have done for both.

The cliffs, and the water which washes round their base, teem, as do the voes. The sea-air flashes with wings; the surface of the sea is broken with the diving. On the cliffs, forms jostle for place. What abounding life is there! Where the kittiwakes can scarce find room on the rock ledges for their dainty young, with the black half-ring round their neck; where puffins bob; and cormorants sit, with the still, sullen gravity of pieces of rock. Any softening of the rude majesty of coast into shelly strand is a haunt of countless ringed plovers.

I have a photograph of one of our number bringing in a pair of rabbits he had just shot for dinner. Older denizens than the white hare, their date is unknown. On a sea-isolated rock, little more than an acre in extent, and scantily

grass covered, I have seen them squirming about in dozens. Silent children of the solitudes were they, against the lifeless stone and screaming sea-birds.

Another of our number shot a stoat on its way into a rabbit-hole. I have stretched myself beside one of these island warrens, with the sea breeze fanning one or other cheek, and the sound of water in the ear. The play was free, as of creatures little familiar with man. I was not their enemy. The stoat was never far away, nor long to wait for.

Here is a clear field. With abundance of stoats is superabundance of rabbits. And the lesson comes clearly out, that in the same natural way the balance would be preserved elsewhere. Between the new gamekeeper for the score or two of grouse, and the stoat which overlooks these Shetland warrens, there can be no doubt as to which does the duty better.

Apart from the rabbit and the stoat, and probably the otter, the mammals are made up of the half-wild ponies, the long-horned cattle, and the small native sheep. I mean the land mammals. On the coast rocks seals bask, and off the shore several species of the whale family blow.

IX

DOWN THE TWEED

ONE has pictured a border scene as a hill, a road, and a water. This is not more graphic than true. So much was laid bare on the thinning out of the olden forest. It scarce matters which way one turns, which glen one enters, the road is along the lower slope or the level bank. The hill is above and the stream below.

So it is in Peeblesshire. The whole county is made up of the stream, with its attendant roads and environing hills. Elsewhere an accident, skirting the border or crossing a corner, here it is the vital current. Feeders enter from the side glens. Some of these glens are ruder than the rest, but all may be simplified into hill, road, and water. The stream is the Tweed.

From Peebles to Ashestiel is a characteristic stretch. The scene gathers more closely in. The banks may broaden into the green haugh; the hills may eddy round a meadowland where graze a few sheep. Only to narrow back till the

RABBIT SHOOTING, SHETLAND

SHETLAND GIRL SPINNING

road finds but scant room over a spur, worn sheer by the chafing water.

Albeit classic, it is still a byway. It is not overrun. It is scarce a tourist's land. The visitors are American rather than Scots; perhaps German rather than American. Humiliating enough, but so it is. Even our kinsmen across the water do not much affect this stretch, but hurry it over to get to Abbotsford, Melrose, and Dryburgh. Down there are the "lions."

It is not objective enough. It selects its visitors just as good literature selects its readers, and good drama its audience. It is not like the Tay—the other notable Scots river. It is not so majestic, so robust. It has not its roll, its sweep. It is not so impressive, perhaps not so picturesque. It does not lend itself to effects. It is subjective and feminine, more refined and intellectual. Its appeals are spiritual. Its spell must be felt. And holiday makers have no time for that: they come to see. No hotels dot its banks as along the course of the Tay. The tourist blight does not rest on the scene.

Nor on the people. They are singularly themselves. Therein lies the difference between highland and upland, between gael and borderer. The strong character acquired through a rude past resists change. As current into pool, so the free wild flow of history has stilled into independence, not loud but deep. Conditions have changed,

not men; at least not much. The same spirit finds a more restricted play in gentler times, and seeks expression in other ways.

The borderer is grim of humour and reserved even to stand-offishness. He were the last to grovel who—by the ordinary standards—is sometimes not quite civil. Temptations, which have beset others and taught them meannesses, are absent. Had they been present, it would have made little difference. The disposition is not there. A rude husk hides the kernel. It does not readily drop off. So hardly does it split that some have thought all was husk. That is a mistake. Exceptions there may be. I speak of men as I have found them; not once, but through many seasons, and under divers conditions. I have known the husk and also the kernel.

In soft murmurs the stream goes by, kissing the green haughs and swishing the long water-grasses. In faultless curves it journeys on before. Mood passes into mood in a cycle of changes, without abruptness; the old mood still returning to pass again. I say mood because, amid so much that is subjective, one finds it hard to draw a line between self and scene. Grave or gay, neath sun or cloud. Never boisterous, only breaking into soft low laughter. Nor yet very sad, at most pensive.

Current comes into being in shallow ripples,

quickens into a lively flow, tempered by the shadows in the hollows. Slowly, very slowly, it softens into pools, and the last low murmurs pass out of hearing. At the line of seeming stillness which yet is not still, the pool breaks into ghostly ripples, deepening to the line of motion across the height of the current.

Some unerring hand might have moulded all this, so faultless in its balance. Some exquisite soul might have set the flow to such rhythm. Among Scots streams it stands first. After the Tweed all seem unbalanced and out of tune. A bar here and there, a perfect note breaking forth, current gathering into pool, or, it may be, a stretch where pool and current alternate. Some graceful sweep which charms the eye and leads it onward. And then a break, a jar, a rude rush, or long pause. Ripple without music, and stillness without poetry.

Rings chase the pool into the last touch of charm. So trout may be regarded less as something to fish for than as artists of the stream. From the centre of the widening circles they sink back into the restfulness of the pool. I have lain on the green haughs and watched them at their purposeful play, while the moments flew by unheeded. So long as the æsthetic sense kept awake was no thought of blood; the savage was asleep. That, too, is a mood sacred to the Tweed.

There are rifts in the lute, jars in the melody; but only few, and not characteristic. The stream strikes against some jutting spur and swirls round in a false curve, or at some too sudden bend cuts into the bank, forming a false eddy. Beyond, the stream is itself again, to pass on in a long succession of pool and current.

The pools have names. Names do not grow in a day. The oldest inhabitant was not at the christening; nor in the oldest tradition, as far as I know, is any account of the origin. These names are used by Tweedside men when they meet on the far side of the globe and exchange fishing experiences, not necessarily apocryphal. They do not lie, at least to one another; they are too seasoned for that. And leave boasting to beardless boys, who soon acquire the reserve of their elders. As a St. Andrews man with a cleek, so each is born with a rod in his hand. Their stories they tell with a certain grim humour to strangers. The exact moral complexion is best shown by an example, which will find its way in by and by.

Of one pool I have delightful memories. Through many a border twilight, and far into the mystic border night have I lingered there. The hills come very close, to lend a deeper shadow to the summer dark. Along the face of the protruding spur the stream flows straight and still. The road overhangs. Where the spur curves back

and the bank bends away is a strip of trees. The wood may be the remnant of far-spreading hazels of long ago. Very like. It gives the name to the passing water.

Less than half a mile down is "the boat-pool." No boat is there now, nor is any tale of a boat. The name alone lingers to tell of what was, and will remain as long as the stream flows. As they have received it, so will anglers and children hand it down. The dwellers in the little hamlet on the broad haugh must have crossed, generation after generation, time out of mind. Then the bridge was built a little further down. Bridge and pool tell the story.

Among the trees on the far side is Traquair. When the Scottish sovereigns lived mainly on the border, this was their chief residence; part of the still older castle is said to be built in with the old house. They hunted here. It was a rich, full, cheery place. Game abounded, of which the scene knows nothing now. Six hundred head were killed on one day.

Tweed boasted three mighty tenants in the persons of a fish, a rodent, and a carnivore. It must have been a drama of no common interest when the autumn-ascending fish of the virgin stream splashed over the beaver embankment, while the otter swam, back and fore, along the upper side in wait. Or when the carnivore, on his way up from the fishing-ground in the early

morning, had to dodge the falling tree, whose bole the chisel rodent teeth had cut through in the night. Not for four hundred years has the Tweed witnessed anything of the kind.

Unchecked by the beaver dam, current and pool were left between the salmon and the otter. Happy days of untrammelled play, out of which so much that is interesting is evolved. What rushes of gallant fish breasted the current or lit the pool with their silver sheen, the otter notwithstanding.

There would be a boat to cross the pool, to where game was, or retainers dwelt. The name may date back thus far. The boat would remain as the village grew and the castle crumbled. The patch of wood by the higher pool may be a remnant of the forest, under whose noontide shadow the deer sheltered, and whose boles the beaver chiselled that the trees might fall across the stream.

Below Traquair, the Tweed has its sharpest bend. It runs straight into the hillside. The road is perched a hundred feet above the stream. I have seen big fish taken under Plora Hill—old fish too, as though the patriarchs of the stream in their weariness sought refuge from the current.

Into the pool a tributary trickles in summer and rushes in winter. It issues from a bare, wild glen; but bare as it is and wild, I have pleasant visions of it. The "baa" of a sheep brings the

heart to the mouth, so lone is it. A small, wiry, tanned man had possession. Most summer days he was there, with no companion save his rod. A borderer wants no other, and rather resents the intrusion of a third. In glaring July sunshine, when the water scarce covered the stones, he fished the stream.

In all my visions of the place he is there, wading in mid-current; nor is it likely that I shall ever get him out of the picture. He had the defects as well as the qualities of the district. One day, early in our acquaintance, I overtook him, casting in a not-to-be-denied way; he always fished with bait. "Had he taken anything?" "Ay, a basketful!" The basket in question sat lightly on his shoulders. In league with its master it looked grave, as though it were stuffed. Like the blotches on the moon, the signs of wear gave it an almost human expression. I half suspected it of relaxing into a wink when my back was turned. A strange trio, whom long fellowship had brought to a perfect understanding, were the basket, the rod, and the man. The angler went on casting, hooked a trout, and waded to the side to land it. I heard it fall through space and strike against the straw bottom. It was the first.

"I sent them home by a boy." This he said with the look of irony the borderer keeps for a stranger. So his forbears might have said to

one who asked if he had lifted cattle. It might be so. He was equal to filling a basket out of any water, only the glen is narrow at the mouth, and I had seen no boy. There was no boastfulness, no special desire that I should think that he was telling the truth; rather, perhaps, to the contrary. Therein is the peculiar moral complexion. We got to know each other better; and he would have gone many miles to show me good water.

The names of the tributaries have a meaning. Like that of the main stream, these were given by an imaginative folk. They are a picture, a tale in miniature. "Quair" means green. "Lyne," the stream of linns or pools. "Manor," the stream of the pebbly channel. This was the Leithen, which tells something of the rudeness.

The stream dominates as in the Tweed. It is not so in the north. One talks of going up the Leithen. The character gives its name to the glen. It is the stream that has linns, or is stony. In the remoter feeders the order is reversed. The stream is lost, or is only part. The ways that wander among the hills are known as "hopes"; it is a border name, or mainly so. Many of these hopes are nameless. I tried to name some of them according to what I found there, but modern imagination is of little use. Often nothing grew higher than the ferns. Here and there a patch of wood darkened the slope. In

the solitude, as of a treeless forest, were no red deer. The bark of the roebuck came from the far distance.

Still closer the hills gather in on the main valley. The scene is increasingly wild. There comes a stretch, solitary as the most contemplative could wish, with no rival in sight to put a ripple on the angler's spirit. The road is on the far side, for the simple reason that there is no room for it on this.

By a dark wood is a still pool. So dense, so almost pitchy dark the wood, that it is not sought even as shelter from the midday heat. The shadow oppresses, as does the atmosphere of heavy deeds. It is Elibank, in the centre of raidland, with many a rude tale to tell.

On the bare slope beyond, is a border keep. It is in ruin ; a scene of jagged walls. An arch is over the lower story, whither the cattle were driven for safety when the beacon fires were lit. Now it is lifeless—save when the stoat brings a rabbit, surprised on the edge of the wood ; or the fox hides, to watch the covey of grouse out on the heather.

The Tweed surges round a grassy islet. It stills into another pool, where it is good to fish, or simply to loiter. Many an hour, through many an autumn, have I cast, and looked, and dreamed. There is so much beside fishing : the dark wood of Elibank ; the ruined keep with its

vaulted lower story for the cattle, sometimes stolen; the rude traditions; the hill, the road, and the stream. Ay, and something more.

One may not get further that way. The bank is rough, with the clinging trees, down to where the branches dip into the Tweed. On the steep, and among the trees, is Scott's early border home, where oft he sat

> Gazing down the steepy linn,
> That hems our little garden in.

Here he spent the poetic years in which he made Scotland the joy of nations. Strangely enough, not the Scotland he loved, and of which he strove to have a little to call his own. His objective genius found ruder effects elsewhere, which took hold of the popular imagination. Bright colours and strong contrasts were better than subtle blending and wizard work, and of these he was master. So it came about that, all unwitting perhaps, he did more for the Teith than for the blended floods of Yarrow and Ettrick, which flowed into the Tweed, just beyond his house.

Men talk of Loch Katrine, not of St. Mary's. For one who follows the ride of William of Deloraine, a thousand follow that of Fitz-James. Top-heavy coach loads swing out from Callander; and one passenger, with stronger memory than the rest, rolls forth the epic to eager ears as they

go along. While only the solitary pedestrian is on the border road. Glen Artney to the Trossachs is classic ground for the multitude.

The uplands and vale of the Tweed are mystic only to the few. Remove Ashestiel and the more famed house lower down, and few would go for what he wrote—say for "The Lay of the Last Minstrel." Few Scotsmen; all rush north. The quiet strikes one sadly, but not altogether unpleasantly. It is better so: all is more as Scott left, and loved it. It might have been better for the Teith also. Less popular, the Trossachs would have been wilder, Loch Katrine more charming; it might not even have attracted the attention of Glasgow. Men look on what they have defaced.

Among the uplands I have wandered for days in high summer, when all were abroad, and found no one. Save for a few Germans, with whom I hobnobbed, as those do who are of a like mind and on the same quest. And so we came to Abbotsford and fell among the ordinary cranks, who like to see where everybody who is talked about lived—what kind of furniture he had, and whether there was a chance of taking anything away.

From Peebles to Abbotsford measures, perhaps, the range of border literature, leaving some ballads outside. Within the same limits are included the changes in border wild life. Fence in

the hillsides from grazing sheep, and the scene will tell its own story. No need to plant; trees will spring up of themselves. It is not so with wild creatures, which, once banished, do not appear so readily.

When Peebles was young, the ablest and most interesting of the Stewarts—whose attachment to Jane Beaufort, formed during his long captivity in England, is one of the romances of history—wrote of a medieval fair day when from enclosed wood and forest the country folk issued to "Peebles to the Play." What wild creatures were startled from the way, or drawn to the edge of the trees by their rude laughter, they were too much taken up with themselves to see. This was from 1423 to 1436. From Ashestiel in 1807 Scott wrote :—

> The scenes are desert now and bare,
> Where flourished once a forest fair.
> Yon lonely thorn, would he could tell
> The changes of his parent dell,
> What pines on every mountain sprung,
> O'er every dale what birches hung.
> Here in my shade, methinks he'd say,
> The mighty stag at noontide lay,
> The wolf I've seen, a fiercer game,
> (The neighbouring dingle bears his name,)
> With lurching step around me prowl,
> And stop against the moon to howl.
> The mountain boar on battle set,
> His tusks upon my stem would whet;
> What doe, and roe, and red deer good,
> Have bounded by from gay green wood.

X

SALMON AND TROUT

A FEW words picture Scotland. Uneven, varied, and picturesque beyond other lands, the subtler elements are wrought into a few bolder effects. But for these she would have no character. She is the land of the mountain and the flood. Should the lovers of her scenery find this bald; for the sportsman, at least, it is enough. She is the land of the grouse and the salmon. What else is there to make a third?

The classic haunt of the grouse is the Highlands. Salmon are there, but take a second place. The classic haunt of the salmon is the border district. Grouse are there, but take a second place. The records of the Tay are mercantile. For how much the different fishing stations were let to tacksmen. What number have been netted in a season. For how much per pound did they sell. Tacksmen are there in the south, whose good or evil luck may interest themselves, but who do not find their way to notice. The annals of the Tweed are the triumphs of sport.

Every borderer is an angler, which is quite another thing from being able to handle a rod. Every ghillie can handle a rod on an off day, which is quite another thing from being an angler. On the border, angling is a tradition with its wealth of story. In the Highlands it is bald and raw. No words will make this quite plain. To learn the difference one must see the borderer at the streamside, and know something of his relation with his rod. An atmosphere will be seen to lie around him. The rod is his companion, not his plaything. Many memories have they in common, which betimes they interchange. It is a business in the north; it is passion in the south.

And yet the Tweed is not in the first rank of salmon streams. Only the unbroken tradition, the seriousness, the passion make it great. It is too narrow, over long reaches, too pent in. The frequent low water gathers the ascending salmon into struggling masses at the cauls, to the temptation of the lieges; and keeps the spent salmon in the pools till they are spotted like lepers. On the lash of a sudden thunderstorm it is given over to sudden rushes, which scour the redds and scatter the spawn, for the benefit of greedy pensioners. From the draining of the olden marshes no longer does the syking lend a long tail of slowly sinking water. A swift rise, as sudden a fall, is the record of a spate. Salmon it has in plenty—too

many of them. The autumn rush is great. Infection spreads. The affluents are few, most of them insignificant. When deep enough to admit the migrants, they are overcrowded.

As a salmon stream the Tay is *facile princeps*. It is generous of proportion, swelling into an estuary, denied to the Tweed. For many a mile from its mouth it is sea flushed. Lake-fed, its extremes of rise and fall are narrowed. The overflow is gathered, the floods tempered, the droughts tided over. Tributaries are ample, as the mighty limbs of a tree. Crowding is unknown. For running fish, the way up; for spent fish, the way down are open. Nor does disease spread as in the attenuated waters of the south.

With bank calling across to bank, and countless fords where the pool shallows and the current runs, Tweed appeals to me as a trouting stream. The smaller forms are in keeping with its character, in sympathy with its atmosphere of poetry and song. Trout are idyllic. The true migrant is the sea trout. Salmon is out of proportion and sensational, and save in some of the lower reaches below Dryburgh and Kelso, might almost be spared. The Tay is a salmon stream, with trout. Salmon are in the greater sympathy. Trout are out of proportion, overshadowed, thrown in. It is perhaps a question whether perfect salmon and trout fishing are found in the same stream.

Ladies do not fish in the south. Though the old borderer was a raider, it would seem as though his wife and daughter stayed at home. It is so with his descendants. I never saw one, save once. She was catching parr about the length of her little finger—parr are to be caught in the Tweed by the simple process of dropping a fly, any way, all summer through. She seemed to be interested in the small fry, which goes to show that she was not a borderer. As a rule even visitors do not fish.

Perhaps it is that fishing is a contemplative engagement, in which the oft-long intervals between the rises dream by with the idyllic flow of the current—at least, they so dream to the flow of a border stream. Ladies may not be contemplative. Trouting leads along miles of chequered bank into wild and solitary places, where the sheepdog's bark is as a clap of thunder. Ladies do not like to be miles away—and alone.

In the north they fish. Royal ladies fish; are said to cast a long, sure line, and land skilfully. They fish for salmon, which is more exciting and less idyllic. Others follow their example as in fashion bound. Whether they go far from companionship I cannot tell. I can scarcely imagine them being led on from morning to night, taking their frugal lunch by the alder tree, with not so much as a shepherd's hut in sight. It flashes across me that I met one scrambling over the

boulders of a brawling Highland stream. She was known to be eccentric.

Trouting is, on the whole, the gentler sport. It bears the same relation to salmon fishing as hawking with the merlin and the peregrine. Trout is the lady's fish, as the merlin, was the lady's hawk. Stalwart men find the art and charm to be as great, or greater. Tackle and lure alike are more delicate. The conditions, atmospheric or otherwise, under which trout will rise, and the argument to be used for the day, are of the subtlest. One must look to the sky, and from the patches of blue to the travelling cloud; to the gleam on the water with the chasing shadow, measuring the interval between; to the insect life dancing in the air and dipping to the current. The fly, most like these creatures of a day and a dance, must be dropped where the ring breaks, in the sunless moment when the gleam has passed. Under the covert of the shadow, deeper by contrast, the trout will rise.

Evanescent elements spoil the reckoning—changes of mood, so sudden as to seem like caprice. Hours there are when the rise should come and does not. Other unpromising hours when a churning is on the surface. The angler notes how cloud and wind and water were thus and thus when the play was merry; and when cloud and wind and water are thus again, goes back to find the play dull. A sharp shower

flushes into sudden spate. As the stream falls the trout should rise. How eagerly they do rise. For an hour I have stood in one spot and cast over the water, dipping down on the sedges, and settling into wine colour. Every cast seems to bring a rise. I can see the place now—the graceful sweep, the fresh green haugh, the purple hills. After a like spate and over the same pool, I have cast in vain.

What is there in pulling out a heavier weight with a stronger tackle, save to cause the mouth to open and the eyes to round? The sensation is gained at the cost of the idyllic; charm and delicacy are gone. An angler, from the crowded record of a long lifetime, had one tale he loved to tell. It came as a sweet morsel, slowly rolling over his tongue. The gist of it was a light rod, a trout cast, and a salmon at the end; such infinite delicacy was needed in the play.

And, like all that is truly delightful, all the real possessions of life, trout fishing is free as air or sunlight. No man need pine for it as something beyond reach. The river flows to the sea, and the water flows to the river, and the burn flows to the water. The rill trickles past every upland cottage door. In Scotland is no village school where the lads may not reach a burn in the interval of lessons, on whose banks he may not spend his Saturday. At the one extreme the expert may cast his delicate fly, at the other the

child may dabble with his bent pin. Around the lure will break the circles of the rise. The thrill of a bite will pass to the chubby hand, which holds the shepherd father's crook.

There is a great republic of the waters. Men will do well to see they do not slip out of their hands. No streamside should be barred to any one who is there for no purpose save for the shadow on the pool, the song of the current, the freshness of the environment, and the art and mystery of the sport.

Nor should the life of our streams be enervated by pet fish reared in tanks, nor changed to the rainbow hues of some stranger from other waters. Not that I think the evil ineradicable. If they do no good, after a little time they may do no harm. The stream will take possession, and shape and tone them into the likeness of its own kind, till those who put them in at first would stoutly disown them as any handiwork of theirs.

It is a while before the stranger finds out what is wanting in the borders. He is impressed by what is there. He looks around, and the wrinkle of speculation is on his eyebrows. And then he bethinks himself that there are no lochs. None, or few. So very few, that one may ascend hill after hill and see no gleam.

In imagination, he places a sheet here and there—a spark round the edge of yonder law, a

silver, wind-chased surface, filling yonder cup, with flights or flocks of water-fowl. And feels how it would light up the scene. The vision passes, the reality comes out. All is brown heath and shaggy wood, with the silver winding down the glens.

So Scott's border ballad is lakeless, save for hints of a few mountain tarns, hidden away in the uplands, by the sources of the streams. In a lakeland the shading would have been lighter. So, too, would the temperament of the people—with no wide expanse of light, relieved only as by the transient gleam on the hillside, or the song of running water. So, too, would the course of border history, the atmosphere of border story and song. The "Lay of the Last Minstrel" might not have been written. Sir William of Deloraine's ride was all by stream-sides. From the Teviot it lasted till—

> Far beneath in lustre wan,
> Old Melrose rose, and fair Tweed ran.

The haughs are green and pleasant, the shade of trees grateful in the midday heat. Between the banks the stream glides, widening slowly by the way. Burns trickle in; and below, the volume of water is so much more. Nowhere does it bud out in a sheet of wind-chased ripples.

Salmon enter at Berwick; they sail for a while

along the border. They pass Dryburgh, where Scott sleeps, and Abbotsford, where he lived. The course narrows: as streams are left behind the volume is so much less. Nowhere may they follow the retreating banks, to dash out into the expanse and freedom of a loch. They are in a pent way from which is no escape. There is a want of freshening. A life within such cramped outlines saps the vigour. Herein may lie one cause of disease.

For the trout—which may not go to sea—is no change of condition, save from one pool or current to another. Monotony is in their annual round. They may not get out of the river, or, as we would say, the rut, for a change of water or diet. There is a lack of the variety found in the life of their kindred, where loch is strung to loch on liquid cords. Lochs mould, feed to greater size, shape on their own model. Enter within and adapt the organs to receive the food they offer. Tint also, stain the flesh pink or red, using for a dye the dull molluscs that crawl up the sluggish sedges, or the crustaceans, which dart hither and thither.

For as many lochs there are as many differences in the life forms; not very great sometimes, but visible enough. Three lochs strung on to one stream may differ in the changes they work. The trout, which have sojourned there for a while, return from their holiday to the current and the

pool, to vary life. Of such forms, the mainly lochless border streams know nothing.

Up the Tay, beyond the tacksman's limits, are magic waters. Lakes abound. There can be few hills of any height that do not possess one. Some command quite a number. Far and near, the gleam is everywhere, breaking and lighting the brown heath. In them is the gaiety of the scene. More there than on the grouse moor; since heath enough grows in the south. Their presence marks the difference from the borders, dispels the melancholy which is only not sadness. The Highlands might be called land of the mountain and the lake. Removing the mountain common to both—as compared with the land of the stream, land of the lake.

Scott, who made Deloraine ride by streamsides, makes Fitz-James ride by lakes. The streams might be neglected, except in so far as they string the lakes together. The scene is changed. Genius nor atmosphere are any longer the same. Lake after lake is passed. A lake seems ever in sight. The horse pants along the connecting stream only to bear its rider to another lake. One, two, three, in a string. Last of the three gives the title, "The Lady of the Lake."

These lakes lie in basins of the poem and gleam out in the verse. From the height of any stanza one is sure to be in sight. The sparkle is on the action as the figures pass along the shore.

The brightness, the exhilaration, the vivacity are theirs. The holiday humour they excite; the laughter of light hearts and sunny moods answer to the ripple on their strands. Remove the lakes and the light would go out.

Men fish the lakes—at least, strangers do: they who come from graver and uglier scenes for a few weeks' refreshing, and space, and beauty. The elbow-room is so great, the ripple so far-spreading, the joy so effortless. And women fish, their laughter rippling pleasantly and sunnily over the rippling of water, away to the magic strand. It is no longer a contemplative person's pursuit—that is horrid. With half a dozen in a boat it may be mixed up with so much that is companionable.

Salmon splash in from between the pent river-banks, and joyously spread out in the ample space, sailing for miles round the winding shores, or across the deep, from shore to shore. In so great a hurry have they been that they still wear the silver sheen of the sea. Nor are the salmon of the lake altogether like those of the lakeless stream, nor the salmon of one lake like those of another.

For the rest, anything may rise to a lure; from a *salmo ferox*—big as a salmon; only not a migrant, but a dweller from year's end to year's end—to a burn trout which has wandered in from the stream for a change, and may be already rounding and flushing pink from the moulding and staining.

XI

LANES AND WOODS

YESTER EVEN, about six o'clock, was a sharp downpour, sharply defined alike in its beginning and end. It came from a cloud that blotted out the sunshine, and left a tail of sunshine behind. The earlier drops made marks the size of a penny-piece. Thicker and faster they came, darkening the grey surface, and gathering into little runlets down the road; sweet and pure was the light after the cloud; infinitely fresh the air.

The birds sang as birds only sing after such a rain. Like the green of the field and wood the sounds were washed purer. It is so with some birds more than others. It seems as though one heard the blackbird for the first time when the bush is dripping, and the chaffinch when the beech is glistening. The rain gave a fresh scene with other voices, new heavens and a new earth.

A few drops had fallen on the thrush's song: it was delightfully clear. In a short avenue, where the trees close over the road, quite a dozen

were singing. Scarce had one song time to die into silence than another awoke.

Only to the shallow do all birds sing alike. So much came clearly out. There is character, accent, tone, and choice of notes, so that it were possible to know each thrush from all other thrushes of the wood. No one supposes that the sitter on the blue eggs with the black spots does not know the voice of her lord, and care for it more than for the rest. Ay, and she knows the song of the thrushes that came to court her, and, when she would have none of them, won other mates. The rivals, too, can tell each other's song, and each knows all the voices as though this corner of thrushland were some suburban society.

Nor does the same bird sing the one song. In the free wild play of sound which the thrush pours out on the air, this is more apparent than in the repeated lay of the chaffinch. There is imitation. A lazy blackbird note finds its way in. There is also rivalry. On such a night, when all are doing so well, it pitches higher or adds an octave to the scale.

If the birds of the same wood do not sing alike, still less do those of different woods. The birds of the south do not sing as the birds of the north, any more than the Somerset people talk as the Fife folk. The air, the scene, the voice of other birds all mould and weave at

the song. There is local colouring, a hint at dialect.

Sounds may not be carried so far. The birds themselves must be made to sing in the same wood. Even then the sense must be trained to birds' song. The so-called musical ear is limited to sounds made by men and women. It knows nothing of the concert of the grove. Only birds are critics there. A parrot reared in Yorkshire came along with its owners to settle in Fife. When the daughter of the house entered the room it announced the fact by saying, "Mina's coomed!" If not so broad, thrush dialect is appreciable, at least, among themselves. Local names mean something. There is such a thing as a mavis.

So, too, and more so, with distance in time. The thrushes of Malcolm Canmore and his Saxon Margaret sang not as our thrushes. If we could hear the talk of olden men it would be hard to know the sound. So of olden songs. Were the thrushes to appear in the woods, dull as we are, we would know the difference, and the modern songsters would listen as to strange birds. And ere time has measured itself as far into the future, will have arisen a fresh song, like and yet unlike, with as marked a change as in the talk of men. Nothing is fixed; there is no single point of rest. The old order changeth, giving place to new. Song is unfolding.

Musing so far away from the thrushes of that particular evening, I reached the end of the avenue and emerged on the open. It was a Scots lane, ruder, more elemental than those of the south, and wrought out of rougher material. Perhaps the main difference is in the want of climbing plants, whose flowing lines, like graceful garments, hide so much away. Withal it had the charm of a lint-locked, bare-footed, country lass.

Deep-rutted by the passing wheels of the farm-cart, broad-margined with grass; on one side a hedgerow, on the other a sunken fence. The rain had been freshening there also. The white blossoms were very pure; the yellow blossoms as pure. The scents, too, were washed purer—the may of the hedge; and that of many lowly plants, only scented after rain.

The songs were low and sweet, not the songs of the high woods. From the tinkling of linnets, and trilling of greenfinches with a woof of other songs, one might know that he was in Scotland, and might even gather that he was on the east coast, if not in Fife.

At the very entrance a little idyll was being enacted. It looked rather silly. Are not all idylls silly to the cold-blooded and unimaginative looker-on? A hen chaffinch was sitting in the rut. The blue-capped, russet-breasted cock was making a complete fool of himself. At all times, a chaffinch on the ground has a short, mincing

step, as though suffering from rheumatism. With his short step, he minced round the arc of a circle and back, over and over again, in front of the hen. It was a somewhat belated courtship on this early June day. Perhaps he had not found a mate, or she had lost one. Tell it not in Gath. For a second marriage takes the rose out of the romance.

Man alone, it is said, lifts the relation of the sexes into the region of the ideal, clothes it round with beauty and a ritual. Whereas, to the observant, man seems but a sorry imitator, and not always a sincere one. It is certainly not in human records, nor in man's progenitors, that we look for moods of romance or lessons of chivalry. Why, the birds sought favour by such gentle arts, and so gave a meaning to love, and beauty to mating; wove the delicate texture of romance when men were savages. If we add their loyalty to their early love, the lifelong fellowship till death do them part, never so much as once repented of nor broken, we know nothing in man loftier nor lovelier; certainly nothing so old. Methinks, sometimes, that the song of birds, of many seasons' mating, shapes itself into the lay of "John Anderson my Jo."

In a crumbling part of the fence, where the stones did not quite meet, a blackbird had built. The hole was not deep; but it chanced that from the same gap a bush grew, whose exposed roots

lent a sufficient amount of stability. It was mainly balance, and needed the eye of an engineer. At the sound of a footstep the sitter slipped out, and passed up the ditch like a shadow. Such care was there for the safety of the eggs; such prescience for the future of the species. The sentiment deepened, the idyll of the lane became graver.

Hard by in a whin bush, was the nest of a rose linnet. The rose is on the male's breast. More fitly is the hen known as the grey linnet. She sat so very, very quietly, that no passing country lad could have told she was there. In the grey of the bush she was hard, indeed, to make out, with her feathers puffed out to keep her charge warm, and her grey head turned a little to one side to command the intruder.

The sitting had lasted a fortnight. With the advent at hand, the care for self was at its minimum; that was why she remained with my hand holding aside the prickles within two inches of the nest. Only a vandal, with no regard for the sacred care and deep joy of motherhood, could have disturbed her. So the idyll—begun in semi-comedy with the mincing chaffinch, increasing in interest with the drifting shadow down the ditch—came toward its charming and somewhat pathetic close in the brooding linnet.

Not a detail, but has some suggestion. Nor one that is altogether new. The boy is father to

the naturalist and the philosopher. So the olden shilfas acted on the Saturday afternoon, when, from a week's crawling like snail unwillingly to school, one was free to go at large. So the blackbird drifted down the shadowy ditch. The exile sees it in visions over half the globe, and sighs.

Migrants are in the lane. They are not altogether our own birds. They stay not with us through good and evil report. Through the blustering days, when the snell wind blows and the slant rain falls, when the linnet's flight note is over the adjoining field and the greenfinches gather to the stackyard, they are absent. They come in summer, and every summer. So that the summer would not be itself without them.

Chief among them is the whitethroat. He is the migrant of the Scots lane. Seems as though the brambles had woven the elastic yet forbidding network across the ditch for a nesting area, that the grass grew long for shelter and the nettles for protection. By the time he comes, plant life is on the rush, the growth is bewildering, and the nester is at fault. The mate dances half mockingly. Half in spite the boy calls him a "bletherer." Several nests are in the lane; two deep in the bramble cushion behind a *chevaux de frise* of prickles; one in the long grass.

None of the characteristic birds of English lanes are there. One scarcely misses them. One

wants everything to be itself. It is among those negative characters which make a Scots lane. If one were to come, it would be like having a singing bird in a house. Or as though one's mother were suddenly to talk English, when her homely doric was part of herself, and woven in with our earliest recollections. All the poetry would be gone.

The man who sought to introduce the nightingale to the north made an experiment doubtful in taste and futile in result. He put the eggs in the nest of a northern bird. He wished to enrich Scots lanes with the "joug joug," the glorious crescendo. Say he did it here; put them under a hedge-warbler. The young birds would imitate the hedge-warbler's lay and never sing the nightingale's song. As the foster-parents would not migrate, the brood would stay along with them and perish. Were the eggs put in the whitethroat's nest, the young would imitate the comic ditty, instead of singing its own tragic lay. It might migrate then, as a nightingale, with the song of a whitethroat. Enough that there are no nightingales nor other English warblers in the Scots lanes.

The remoteness of this no-man's-land, between highway and highway, is the atmosphere of nomad life. Tramps swarm—from the aristocracy with van and horse, through the philistines with cart and donkey, to the plebs with a low dark

creepie. Yea, to the outcasts, who owe to nature their board, and by sheer weight of body make a depression in the elastic bush, and sleep on a scented pallet under the nodding broom flowers.

A lad was sitting on the grass; he lives much alone. The wont of the family is to scatter and know where to meet, and the children fall in with the arrangement. It is a pathetic life, with the breeze and the shower, the broom and the lane. But it is not all sadness nor loss. He was happy, if homeless. He mimicked the songs of the birds. It is the language he knows best, perhaps loves most. A Scots tramp talks the native doric, and whistles the local birds' songs.

It was a land of lanes; the fields were meshed in them. A mile on was another. It blazed. Nothing flowers so passionately as broom. The glow and the passion are on the spirit that looks. In the lane was a niche set in a bank and overshadowed by trees. They who chose it were masters of out-of-door life, an art by itself, like woodcraft. Known only to nomads by profession, through lifelong practice it becomes a second nature, and in the course of long transmission an instinct. In the niche were two long, low, dark, cylindrical creepies, an abode common to all the nomads, and doubtless moulded out of their experience as best suited to the conditions.

Beside each creepie sat two nomads, a man and

a woman, grave, and concerned with their own life. There was none of the curiosity at the intrusion on a quiet scene which brings so many heads to suburban windows. Save that single touch of nature—the woman's hand raised to straighten her hair—was no sign of notice. A wild sense of good manners would have let us pass unobserved. I have ever found it so in the best class of nomads. A fire burned as though there might be something to cook.

On the far side of the lane a strange, roughly sugar-loaf-shaped knoll lifted its head above the glowing broom. One would have thought it a rock standing out from the soil, save for certain outward marks. Perforated, almost terraced with holes, it resembled nothing so much as a gigantic field-pigeon house. The rabbits were in possession, and made of it a teeming warren.

It might have been coincidence, but so it was that the niche in the lane—which the instinct of the nomads had sought out as the best shield from the weather—was just over against this picturesque haunt of rodents. As they lay by the creepies, while the shadows lengthened and the yellow broom grew golden in the evening light and grey twilight came, behold the dead knoll came to life. Later on the white scuts, like so many terrestrial glow-worms, lit up the dimming lane. I know not certainly the connexion between picturesque nomad and picturesque

warren. Something may or may not have happened in the dark. Beyond grew a wood, through which, at first, was scant shoulder-rubbing passage. No sunlight penetrated the close thatch of fir needles. One felt as though he would pull a broom taper to help him through. The flash of a magpie's wing crossed the gloom. Others were there, lights of a purer spark.

Where the boles thinned out to give more space, oaks grew. The blaeberry crept out on the wood floor. Countless pale pink bells rung round the wiry stem, and under the oval leaves. There was abundant promise of a table spread in the wilderness. Such woods are common in the ruder lowland parts and along the lower slopes of hills. Under a rough bush a robin sat on her three russet-hued eggs. The pink bells rung around her. The wood softened into a great grove of birches, closely packed as the firs, not stiff nor dark, but infinitely light and graceful. In its firs and birches and blaeberry flooring was it a Scots wood. Among the birches sang many willow warblers. This is our woodland migrant.

Then the wood echoed with lively sounds. Not laughter, nor telling of lightness of heart, but such sounds as might be made by wild creatures at play. The voices were young, from the throats of boys, but not ordinary boys. The sounds broke out again and rung through the wood. Past the birches and against the light which told of the

edge of the wood, figures were moving among the tree boles. Low down along the ground was a dark cylinder. The adults looked on while the children were at their evening play. I repeat it was not gaiety, except in so far as the play of young foxes may be said to be gay. It was boisterous enough, but it did not add to the joy of the wood.

Much of the land was of no other use save to look wild, and in the early summer to cast over itself a garment of dusky blossom, such as now glowed through the trees. Birds were there—finches and warblers, flitting from bush to bush and perching on the topmost twigs. The greenfinch trilled, the whitethroat rollicked, the stonechat clicked. This further end do the commons serve. Compared with the design of the nest, the creepie was an artless hovel. The dainty ways and relations of the birds made the nomads savages; the wild lore made them bunglers. After play the children would gather a few eggs for supper, ere they turned in for the night.

Nomadic life is abroad in these wild places. Creepies are dropped everywhere, always where the charm is wildest. I had seen the wandering unit singing back to the singing birds; the pair of grave adults in the lane hard by the sugar-loafed rabbit warren; the family at play on the outskirts of the dimming wood and the margin of the glowing common.

XII

GOLF LINKS AND WILD LIFE

A MORNING dawns afresh from the past. Children went out ere the dew was off the grass, the girls—slender basket in hand—to gather nuts, the boys to show their prowess, by leaping from the turf into the sandy and half-weird depths of "Corbie's hole." The dew lies on the memory of that morning.

It was a stretch of bent-covered blown sand, somewhat north of the Forth and south of the Tay. Fife, as all the world knows, is a peninsula, with more of sea coast than any other county on the east of Scotland, and for that reason is a paradise of links. It is the olden golfing land when golf was young, to which all the new-sprung links look back as children to their home, as colonists to their native country. Golf was younger then.

Wind-spun dunes rose rank within rank; the outer and younger facing the sea, the older and inner rolling and softening, as waves soften into ripples and lose themselves on the shore. Here

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NEST OF THE MALLARD

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and there the turf was lifted, and the farm carts bore away the sand, leaving deep or shallow pits. Of such was "Corbie's hole."

The lark sprang from the turf to carol over the heads of the nut-gatherers, the linnet sang the song of the whins. Far between were the nests, where was space for all. The wandering feet disturbed the sitters. A scream at the rising of the mallard softened into murmurs of delight, as was laid bare a clutch, full as that of the sitting hen at home. Girl hands brushed down the panicles of grass, lest the boys should take the dusky eggs of the moss-cheeper.

Through the years I hear the plaintive pipe of the golden plover, the wail of the lapwing, the querulous scream of the summer tern; just as I see the glow of whins, the sheen of the blue seaside butterflies, and the bent girl forms. Ah! those forms. How charming human nature looks through the haze of distance, how the beauty of it appears.

The village stood on the north-west corner; a simple community then, with many unspoiled characters. When trade was slack of an afternoon, the shopkeeper would take down his somewhat primitive clubs, to knock the balls about over the untamed course. Golf was an escape from the narrowing influence of barter, an outlet for the sporting instincts cribbed behind the counter, a breezy and healthful element in village

life. It led into the fresh air, fostered the love of space, of sky, and sea, of the glow of whins, the carol of larks. No less did it teach the love of fair play, and was at the making of true men. The golfer was an accident lost in the sheen, dwarfed in the largeness, wandering half-hidden through avenues of tall blue grasses and dusky bushes.

No longer are the links wild with untamed bent grasses. The whins are passing; at most they glow as solitary tapers in untenanted corners. The nut-gatherers are visions undying. The simple men are memories, or to be seen in pictures. From an accident the golfer became the main feature. Blight fell upon the scene.

And lifelessness. In lessening numbers lark and linnet sing. Lapwings scream and golden plovers pipe elsewhere. Nesting sites were trodden down. Of the rarer species none were left. Space and air to sing in must be found elsewhere. For these the exiles sought in one of two directions. Further along the coast, on some other stretch of bent-bound sand, the natives might have retained the simple habits of their forefathers. But where? To the west, across a stream, was one of a circlet of Fife courses of date unknown, a miniature St. Andrews.

To the east was a ruder scene. For two miles the links ran on, skirting Largo Bay. It was

a wild walk. At the end whereof was a sleepy hamlet; in very deep sleep indeed. This hamlet awoke to the possibilities of the links and claimed its share. There, too, the whins are passing, the bents are tamed or replaced by smoother turf; an olden nesting site is a putting green; its olden birds, so long undisturbed save by the nut-gatherers, are gone.

The two hamlets have entered into partnership. The outgoing players from the one pass the players from the other, and on returning pass them once again. So they circle round. And this is but the beginning. Whatever wildness there is remains to be subdued.

Elsewhere, in this golfing county, men are equally busy. Dunes, the natural outworks of such a scene, are being softened, and the bents which waved in the sea breeze over the nests are shorn; until, as far as I can think, only one stretch is left where breeding may be done in peace. Happily, it is great and ample. Thither the ousted birds have directed their flight, and there the olden tenants of many a links must have gathered.

Even that has been threatened. The eyes of golfing clubs have been upon it. These attentions will not cease. It is too tempting to be let alone. Should it be invaded, the last refuge will be indeed gone. The good sense of the proprietor, with a little backing from such as care for

these things, may put off the evil day—has put off the evil day.

The nearest village, just on its edge, must have its golf-course. The stretch of blown sand between it and the sea, bore the same relation as other links to other villages. It seemed but fit that they should enter on possession of as much as would lay out into the orthodox eighteen holes. After all, it was but a little corner from a vast area. Still it would have been the thin end of the wedge. I assume that was why the course was laid out, not on the seaward, but on the landward side.

Last season I was crossing the moor, as I do more than once every year. I stood in the midst of the vast environment, absorbing the charm and the weirdness of the scene; listening to the many wild calls, and more particularly watching the play of a pair of dunlins. A voice startled me—as voices other than those of birds do in such places—and asked me if I had any eggs. "For," said the perfectly courteous interrogator, "the proprietor wishes to protect the birds." "I am glad to hear it," was my reply. One of such tastes is scarcely likely to let loose the golfers.

The tenure changes, the tenant passes. Other men, other ideas. The place is not safe. Some restraint more permanent than a life, more tangible than sentiment, more generally understood than a love of nature, may have to be applied.

This movement must modify the wild life of our coast; to quite an appreciable extent, alter its distribution. A single coast golf-course will disturb the balance to its degree; the combined effect of many golf-courses is hard to estimate. Where was a breeding place, and is one no longer, the summer fauna must be altogether different and infinitely poorer. The olden birds which lived all the year round will be no more seen. Visitors from the south—time out of mind—will cast a glance from the wing and pass on. Summer terns which splashed in the lit waters will scream maledictions. Bright eider drake and dark duck will find no place among the trodden heather patches.

Winter birds, which pass the short days on the shingle and the sandbank, or feeding in the weed-fringed pools of the rocks, may go in summer and return in autumn. But that depends on how far they have to go. After a while they may find coasts as rich and sheltered, nearer their nesting place.

Of course, golf must go on. Were it the old delightful game, and the players sportsmen, it is well that it should go on. No one loves sport more than I do. I love it well enough to wish that it may not kill itself out, which, granting rope, it seems bent on doing. All who frequent the links know that it is not the old game, and two-thirds of the new contingent of players are

not sportsmen. Golf is no longer sincere. And like other insincere things is in danger of passing. Men play to win, and are crabbed when they lose, deny every merit to another's game, think the turf in league with their opponent to rob them of their just rights. Rudeness is common where only courtesy prevailed. The very atmosphere is stifling.

Signs are not wanting that the better class are disposed to retire from the game. To the olden sportsman, golf is memory's guest, and he would rather have the unsullied remembrance of it than the coarse reality. If he be tempted down to the tee-box and be not jostled out, he will have an unhappy round, in which rude words may be addressed to him. He has left no successors. The modern school have no traditions. They ask for no environment and get none. They play a bare game in a keen way, as bare as they who play on a billiard table in a heated room. No charm is left, nor wandering outline. Many are not to be distinguished from professionals. I beg the professional's pardon, for certain of whom I have a great respect, and whose position is at least plain. Why make distinctions? The name of amateur has ceased to have any meaning. Links there are, being increasingly shunned. St. Andrews is one of them. Men come, but not they who were wont to come. In summer there is a rush, but it is an ugly rush. Ugly or

not, their money is good. The turf is an asset of the town. Such is the modern gospel.

So much by the way. It is no immediate concern of mine. My theme is not the ousting of the olden golfers—who disturbed as little as they could—sad as that may be. The contrast is great. The fowl in possession are not interesting. And those who have a little horizon behind, a few years of retrospect, sigh for still older tenants, who shared what was once all their own.

Many birds that winter by the sea, when spring comes round, seek the country for choice. The curlew's whistle is heard alike from the fisherman's and the peasant's cottage. It is a matter of suitable nesting site, wherever found. May not coast breeders go along with them and share in the boundless possibilities? The inlands of Fife have many moorlands. Many whin-covered knolls of igneous rock, many stretches of barren sandstone, many heathery peat wastes.

Once upon a time this would have been all very well. In the olden days, golf was a coast game; and they who cared to play turned their faces to the sea. In the evening the ring of quoits was heard on the inland village green. But the craze spread. It was not enough to have a fortnight in the summer, or an afternoon at the end of a long railway journey. Men must have it nearer home; ay, and women too.

Would-be golfers looked out for some eligible

piece of land. The barren place was the cheaper. From the rabbit borings, it had probably the lighter soil. Whin and heather, those best of natural hazards, abounded; a ditch or old quarry lent variety. A burn ran through, which might be crossed more than once. The stretch was leased: some green-keeper of note was summoned, to tell how it might best be laid out. The rough parts, where the wader nested beside the grouse, were tamed. The moist places, where the mallard raised her brood near the water-hen, were drained.

And so it came about that the coast birds arrived in March or April to find the secret avenues among the glowing whins invaded by men running after balls. The curlew rose higher in the air, or took a wider sweep to spy the land, and find where next to place its great dim eggs. The new-comers were as much at a loss as where they came from.

Only last night, I heard the pipe of a redshank mingling with the scream of a lapwing. For want of a better place, it was nesting on the pasture land, among the feet of the grazing sheep. A rustic sat by the stream watching the restless flight. Even to his bucolic wit, it seemed away from home. The bird would not light while the man was there. The man's work being over for the day and his dull curiosity awakened, he was in no hurry. I left them to their trial of patience.

Nor do the elevated moorlands, along the hill slopes, any more offer a free nesting site for the brooding birds; whether by the prescriptive right of long usage, or as a refuge from persecution elsewhere. The ingenuity of the golfer is astonishing. The complaisance of the proprietor is equally great. No special care for the rarer species seems to deter him, or is likely to do unless they have sporting possibilities.

Opposite the window where I write, is a long ridge of upper old red sandstone, sufficiently steep to make a stiff climb or a swift roll down. Against its side, cattle cling, with ever and anon their heads down to the grass. No! they are not cattle. I can just make out the figures of little hill-scrambling men, as now they stoop to tee, and anon follow their balls. These shallow dumb wounds through the thin sprinkling of soil are bunkers. The putting greens, like little niches for images, are cut into the hillside, or sunk like grassy bunkers below the level, so that the ball which reaches them will stay. About it is an element approaching the grotesque. No wonder if the redshank, whose whistle used to come from there, is now piping beside the lapwing on the pasture.

Not a single inland course that does not, in some way, alter the wild life. In villages—as is so often the case—where is only one rude stretch the loss must be irreparable. All the rich variety

of moorland birds will go not to return, and calls and flights once familiar will be no more seen or heard.

Of course, the villagers will not care: they have not been taught to care. Their wants are enough. For the rest, their ears are dull that they do not hear, and their eyes that they do not see. But, somehow, I think no loss is without a gap. The stream by the cottage door is no more than a trickle, save in flood time; but one would not like to be told that the tail of the water had gone past, or to look on the dry course. So with the stream of life.

The old woman, framed in the little square window, drops her stocking in her lap at that plaintive moorland call. Perhaps she knows that it comes from the bird of the golden coat with the black breast. In her vague way it sets her thinking—it was so when she was a girl. At that rippling whistle, after the blinds are drawn, she gathers the children round her, in the candle light, and tells them the story of the bird with the long bent beak, that was made so because there is in it something fateful. In this, or some other way, is loss.

The sum of many courses, by many villages, legions of them, each village aiming at a course of its own, will be very great indeed. Many streams of life flowing one way in the spring, and another in the autumn, and trickling throughout

the winter, will cease. Only the dry stones will be left. The tenants of the moorland or common may find elsewhere to go, and other places will be richer as they become poor. Or they may be driven to change their natural wild nesting places for the homelier pasture ground.

Such is the redistribution going on through the agency of golf. Whether for good or evil boots not. Only it is needful, in any account of the wild life of Scotland, to distinguish the present from the past, and show how things are tending. So marked is this as to strike the bucolic sense of the rustic by the streamside; who, all innocent of theory, only knows that a new cry is in the air, a new form has joined the lapwing, a new tenant has come to the pasture.

On the whole, the change is greatest on the coast, where is only a narrow strip very much sought after, because of its light dry bottom, its sparse grass, and sandy bunkers. And in the case of birds whose habits compel them to breed near the sea. Such, for instance, as the various terns which dive for a living, and even feed their young on fish. Driven from one coast moor they must find another, which may take them so far away that they will no longer come and go. The alternative of breeding on the sand outside the dunes is not always possible. The range of high tides is an objection. The immediate neighbourhood of a golf-course is a busy and disturbing factor.

What the end will be, when wild life will come to something like its old balance, were hard to say. If the modern movement is allowed to spend itself, then we must just wait to see how much it takes and how little it leaves. But some restraint may be exercised. A spirit of fair play, a desire to give the birds they are hunting out a chance, may awaken, not too late. A line may be drawn from the outside. Unless, as a people, we adopt his lordship's philosophy that golf pays, and we cannot afford links for birds to breed on. "I cannot see that terns are of any use."

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NEST OF THE LESSER TERN

XIII

OSPREY, TERN, AND GANNET

THE tale I have to tell of the osprey is, on the whole, a sad one; but no sadder than we look for in a bird so rare, so charming, and so full of interest. The demon of slaughter pursues all we most wish to live. There was when it needed not to be sought for in vain. It is scarce too much to say that the loch which met its wants was exceptional where was no osprey. The young grew up to seek out fresh scenes for themselves. New sites were occupied; other lochs were brightened.

A fishing eagle, the osprey seeks trout. Where they abound it will take pike. A less agile fish, lying in wait through long intervals of sluggish inaction, the pike is more easily caught. In Scotland, where trout are commoner than coarser fish elsewhere, we prefer to think of the osprey as a trout fisher. Doubtless, too, it has the spirit of a hunter, preferring the quicker fish and the cleverer catch. With pike and trout in one view, it will dash on the trout.

Poising above, it mirrors itself below. An intense speck where all is vague, it arrests the eye which was wandering over the abounding life. The circling in the air, the downward bend of the head, between the beating wings, are heart-stirring and dramatic. The few trout taken during the summer months are no loss. The most conservative of landlords has no charge. So far as I know, more than one pair do not fish the same sheet; and a loch is a big place for two birds.

Nevertheless, the old scenes are dull, the old sites deserted. At the distance of sixty years from the heyday, it is the exception to find the lake that boasts of an osprey. The vandal was not the proprietor. The greater part of the blame attaches to the naturalist. In Sutherland, the same series of events passed, in like order, on to the same issue. All was done in the light there, so that we can follow it more clearly.

The idyll of our wild life is the osprey, if only for the sake of Charles St. John. It is the brightest vision that passes over his fascinating page; appears in the brightest episodes of a delightful tour. The other birds of prey might have been gathered round, but to show how this form excelled. The golden eagle has none of the glamour; the peregrine lacks the intense moments of pause and movement; there is no repose. On the passing of the osprey, dullness

descends, the light goes out, the charm vanishes. For this reason the earlier or osprey chapters are the brightest and most attractive.

Seems as though St. John felt the spell. A gleam of sunshine falls on the record of that particular morning when he sets forth for its haunts. An added vivacity, as from the growing excitement; an elevation in the lines, as in one who rises on tiptoe to catch an early glance, tells of a near approach and the breaking of the scene. "I was delighted beyond expression to see two ospreys, one on the nest, the other soaring over the loch."

In 1848, Sutherlandshire was the home of the osprey for Scotland. Many things were there to attract it. A land of lakes caught the eye of the lake lover. These lakes teemed, as they still teem, with life. A third feature, which lends a strange picturesqueness to the scene, was potent as the other two. To some eight or ten feet above the surface rise certain characteristic truncated cones, as though waiting to be crowned. These cones determined the nesting site for the area. In the centre of action, the sitting bird could watch the diving of her lord, or look down where the trout darted from the ominous shadow, or drew near with a certain fearful curiosity.

The scene was infinitely remote and quiet. Much of it was rude, with sparsely scattered game, which offered few attractions to the sports-

men of the day. Tourists had not yet found out Sutherland, nor naturalists. Both are common now. It is the birds that are rare. Only one sportsman-naturalist, who went, not as a sportsman to kill grouse, but as a naturalist to be among the wild life.

St. John was a pioneer. His were fresh footmarks; almost first prints in a virgin soil, like those Robinson Crusoe saw in the sand. He was a prince of pioneers. In its simplicity and detail, his story recalls the pen of Defoe. Delightfully unselfconscious is the manner of telling what he met in the *terra incognita.* The freshness of the style adds freshness to the scene. The charm affected the curious, and may have led to much that came after. Under such guidance, at the distance of sixty years, the reader crosses a land yet unblighted and teeming with wild life under natural conditions. If judicious, he will be satisfied with this; he will not care to go. He can scarcely have both. The new Sutherland he can acquire only by the loss of the old.

Over these summer lakes the osprey reigned on high. Multitudinous wild-fowl nested along the shore. Red-necked phalaropes ran lightly over the broad leaves of the water-lilies, or called to each other from their hiding among the weeds. These were among its subjects. The depths were its dim hunting places, the trout its game. We owe the knowledge of its reign in Sutherland,

with all its delightful attendants, to St. John. Mark how the story runs.

"We could distinguish the head of the female on the nest. It was determined that I should remain concealed near the loch, that I might have a chance of shooting the old osprey. At last I fired, and the poor bird, after wheeling blindly for a few moments, fell far to the leeward of me. We found two beautiful eggs in the nest." In the previous chapter occurs, "Why the poor osprey should be persecuted I know not, as it is quite harmless." Harmless, certainly in Sutherland, where were trout enough for all; harmless as beautiful. It reads very strangely, the deed and the sentiment. A naturalist who has lived on the shore for years writes me: "I know the lake well and every bird on it. There is no osprey, nor, so far as I know, has there been one since that shot by St. John."

Much the same may be said of other Sutherland lochs visited on the tour. There is no fishing eagle. Long since have the winds scattered the nests on the truncated cones. The osprey is a shy bird. Easily driven away, it does not readily come back. Sutherland has lost the old spell. Its attractions have vanished, save the quaint sites, and these are not enough in themselves.

Loch Assynt has a ruined castle standing on a peninsula, once an island. On the highest part

of the wall was a pile of bleached sticks, which, two years before St. John's visit, had been an osprey's nest. In the absence of the truncated rocks of other lakes, this is as near an approach as could be made. Nor is it an isolated instance.

The centre of interest was removed further south, to a singularly wild and picturesque little loch in Strathspey. An island bears a ruined castle. As at Assynt, on the high part of the crumbling wall, the osprey built. From the shore the nest could be seen. Season after season the female sat there. The diving of the male, and the bringing of his catch to the nest were interesting dramas in a charming environment, at once so quiet and so remote. How long the tenure lasted were hard to fix with any certainty. A tradition, of which the natives are not a little proud, enables us to carry it pretty far back.

Ronaleyn Gordon Cumming, of lion-hunting fame, once swam across, breaking the ice by the way; and, with nothing more serious than the loss of a little blood, brought the eggs ashore. This mild adventure and instance of pluck and endurance are interesting in the story of one who was to do so much more stirring deeds. He died in 1866. And as this bears the mark of youthful adventure, more than likely the ospreys of Aviemore were contemporaneous with those of Sutherlandshire. It must have been a late frost that sealed the lochs so far on in spring, and a

reference to weather records might fix the date. Were the story apocryphal, it still bears out that the osprey of this lake is not a thing of yesterday. Where are traditions is a history; and the history is older than the life of the oldest inhabitant ere it shades into tradition. In a note about 1860, John Colquhoun relates how the ospreys of this ærie "have been wantonly destroyed within the last few years." This can scarcely refer to the Gordon Cumming episode, in which is no talk of the slaughter of the birds; and shows that the vandalism was not infrequent. On the whole, they have been wonderfully faithful and forgetful —for ospreys.

On the 3rd or 4th April the birds came back. It was a beautiful sight to see them sail on to the loch, and, after flying round it several times, sweep down on the water. It was the first kill for the season. So charming, so idyllic was it, that it became an asset of the place. Those interested largely advertised the home of the osprey, and tempted the curious north, even at the forbidding Easter season. Among the æsthetic who loved to watch the evolutions, came naturalists, covetous of skin or eggs. Therefore the somewhat chequered history of the haunt. A hint to all true friends to keep these matters as quiet as possible.

The old birds set about repairing the nest. Therein the eggs were laid, roundish of shape, white of ground shade, blotched with a rich red-

brown. One brood was raised each year. Only one pair returned. It is usual for the old birds to claim the old site. What of the young? An element of variety was lent to the story of this haunt. Some years the birds did not return to this loch, nor build on the castle, but came to a smaller loch at a little distance, and built up a fir-tree on the shore. It may have been that they were disturbed and yet loath to leave, or mere caprice. Or the young birds may have built as near their native water as possible. Never, as far as I am aware, were the two sites occupied in the same season.

Some ten years ago a strange thing happened. Three came back, of which two were cocks. The hen set to work. The cocks spent the time in fighting, and fought on for days with dire intent but varying fortune. So equally matched were they, that neither would acknowledge defeat, nor yield up the prize. And still the hen worked on. It would have made an attraction of the first order had there but been time to spread it abroad; a change from the calm sailing on to the lake. In stern quiet the drama went on, with but a few curious natives peeping from among the trees. It was which would hold out the longer. The crisis came at length.

Reeling down together, one got on the top and drowned the other. It was a fitting end for the lake eagle. The conqueror gathered himself and

rose painfully into the air. Then a second curious thing happened. The female, that had been so busy while the fight lasted, stopped building, as though she had no further interest in her work. Her leaning was to the conquered, an unusual thing in birds. Her heart was with the drowned osprey. The torn victor approached her in vain; she would have none of him. She flew away, and that year was no nest.

The old castle remains with the site, but no sitter is there. The loch offers the olden picturesque environment, and much of the olden remoteness and quiet, but no bird poises in the air or breaks the stillness of the water.

By these lochs in the olden (a letter would make them golden) times, a double picture might often be seen. The kestrel moved round in a circle to scan the ground. With wing pulsations, slow or quick, but always intense, it poised over one spot. It dipped or rose for focus. Then it dropped on the vole. So wheeled the osprey on the lake. So it hung suspended over the trout. So it dipped or rose, till the blurred outline became clear enough for the stoop.

On the close of nesting, the osprey, like the peregrine, becomes a wanderer. Then it follows the course of streams, which may issue from the lakes. It poises, startling the solitary angler as it breaks the stillness of the pool. Emerging, it shakes its plumage, raining down the drops.

The dart of the kingfisher from an overhanging bush on the minnow of the shallows, brings out the contrast between little and great, charming and sublime. From the surface dip of the water-ousel, through the flash of the kingfisher, to the stoop of the osprey is a wondrous ladder in diving. Many touches of beauty or drama hang in the mental gallery of the wanderer by the stream.

Some twelve years ago an osprey followed the curves of the Tay, in its passage across Strathmore, scanning the water as it went. For three weeks it poised in the air of Stanley, and stooped on its deeply shaded pools. Another year it came not back, nor has it been seen since. The running water, as well as the lake, is impoverished. So the osprey passed the later summer and early autumn until it was time to go. For, unlike the peregrine, it does not stay the winter.

The manner of diving is interesting, and differs in many curious ways among the divers from a height. Suddenly, closing the wings, the osprey drops like a stone. Sometimes it plunges completely under, and again appears only to break the surface. So the tern poises, so it rises and dips. So it searches the water just beyond where the ripples are blurring the margin of the sea. It never wheels like the hawk. Its beat is one fretted line—length without breadth—not a still wide expanse.

The tern grasps its prey with the bill and dives head first. The osprey uses its feet and drops, so that it may have them ready. The tern's dive is clean, and with a minimum of splash, the water rising over it in a bell-like arch. The certainty with which either strikes, after the measurable time of passage through the air, and the large proportion of catches, lead one almost to assume a species of fascination, as though the quarry were paralysed by the impending fate. A shoal of sand-eels will broaden the mark for the tern. The trout will poise, as the osprey in the air, and remain suspended.

Say the fish has moved and goes out of sight, or beyond the direct reach of the stoop, or such swerve as is possible, the osprey will arrest its motion within a yard of the surface and avoid the dive. All this is done by the tern. And with a still more marvellous dexterity, inasmuch as the difficulty of catching itself up, in a bird going down head first, is necessarily greater. Slightly loose and pointed back, the wings are ready for instant use, in case of the plunge being needless.

The environment of the tern, if less idyllic than that of the osprey, less restful, less varied, undefined by a charming circle of shore line, unshadowed by the smooth outline of investing hills, has still the blue-grey water breaking in silver ripples on the yellow sand, the weird dunes,

the beetling cliffs, the deepening purple of the horizon where sea approaches sky. As the osprey of the inland sheet, so is the tern the idyll of the shore.

Neither reaches very deep. No impetus is there to bear them, save the fall of so many feet. By a sort of nervous eagerness the tern seems to force itself down, and it has all the advantage of the cleaner dive. Still it must grade its force where the sand almost kisses the surface. The osprey may make up for the less clean impact by the greater height of its poise. Seldom does the tern dive from more than thirty or forty feet. Both are migrants, idylls of the summer waters. Like the osprey, the tern leaves for the winter.

Different from either is another bird. The solan goose is a native. It lights the grey atmosphere, and breaks the grey water of winter. Perhaps the light and flash are more marked against the sombre background. It is the idyll of the deep, as the tern of the shallows, and the osprey of the lakes. It is the idyll of the dark months, as they of the bright ones.

Ample is the area. The solan goose fishes after a manner of its own, adapted to the sea. There is no slow circling search. It comes on at a great rate, looking down by the way. No poise nor focus is there. Nor does it simply close the wings and drop. The glitter that catches its eye may be fathoms deep, and it must get

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SOLAN GEESE NESTING ON AILSA CRAIG

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down that length. Without abatement of speed, it swings round in a mighty curve, returns to the spot in a powerful descending spiral, and vanishes head foremost. The dive is cleaner than the tern's—above it rises a shapelier, mightier bell. All the force used up in the dive it gets from the flight aloft, nor in any way does it try to force itself further down.

The surface divers, the ducks and grebes of the lakes, the guillemots and razor-bills, the red-throats and black-throats of the sea, turn up their tails, and go down unnoticed or only seen by the curious. But the poise, the dip and rise, the sporting element, the eagerness often breaking out into a scream on sighting the game, the bolt-like descent, the splash, the bell-like rise of the broken water arrest the preoccupied wanderer by lake or coast, waken the dreamer rocking out in the boat. The divers from a height separate themselves from the rest, are the idylls of the scene.

XIV

CROWS AND GULLS

ROOKS and gulls follow the plough which is turning over the fallow. The peasant looks not from his team. The child, sitting on his father's jacket, points not his chubby finger at one bird more than the other. Even the dog troubles not to chase them. Plainly the gulls are not strangers, so near the inland cottage with its honey-suckled doorway, and the windy elms where the rooks rock of a night.

Black and white, from sea and land, they seem as unlike as birds could be, save in the common appetite which draws them to the same field and into one furrow. So misleading are appearances.

Say by some trick of harlequinade the colours were suddenly transferred, so that the gulls wore the sooty garb, and the crows the lighter gull shades. One might rub his eyes as when something has happened, he cannot tell what; and after a more searching glance conclude that he is under some mistake. The herring-gulls in the field might pass for rooks even when a rook is

by, and waken just so much curiosity, and no more, in the driver of the team. The child and the dog would see no change.

For each species of the groups might be found a fitting double. Chough would pass for kittiwake as they sat side by side on the same rock ledge overlooking the warring sea. The black-headed gull has the quaint strut—a little quicker in the step—and knowing ways of the jackdaw. Needs but the staining of the wings to be carried over the body, for the lesser black-back to masquerade as carrion or grey crow. Raven and great black-back in each other's garb, might pass among the clans over which they reign in chief.

In habits they are still more alike. If some are bad habits, it is from no special seeking of theirs. When the spheres are somewhat different—which is by no means always the case, since each is equally at home in that of the other—the acts are of like shade and often black. There is some reason for this. They have neither place nor function they can call their own. Nothing grows for them in nature's wild garden, nor is hatched for them in nature's wild nursery. What they most incline to can be had only by crooked methods, when it is not placed just tantalizingly beyond their reach. Their food is picked up by the way; they live on scraps. Well-nigh anything will do at a pinch, and must be taken without so much as by your leave. Scavengers

are they, raiders, thieves, murderers, what you will!

By the seaside, which is supposed to be its home, is no more helpless creature than the gull. The duck can make an honest living; it can dive. So can the guillemot and the razor-bill, the red-throated diver and the black. From aloft, tern and gannet dash down on the sand-eels. Each has its sphere. The appetites are fixed, the actions outlined. Each has its special prey which it is fitted to pursue; and where the prey, there it is found. No temptation besets them to take from another. These are the respectable members of this society, observing its conventions and with the full approval of the feathered Mrs. Grundy. I have seen them gorging, and have been sorry for the lookers-on, who, save when some of the frightened fish were driven to the surface, had no food.

The gull cannot dive, much as it would wish, when the shoal is passing almost within reach of its pendent legs. A touch of irony is in these webbed feet, which might have helped it down as they help others, but only serve as paddles to drive it aimlessly over the surface. At sea, it is a pensioner on the divers. It loafs about the harbour for the refuse of the fishing-boats; it scans the shore for what may be cast up by the waves. When these chance sources fail—as they often do, especially in the summer—it is glad to get a

bite of anything. With eyes on the ground, it sails over village, lane, and field, dropping down on whatever has been thrown out, or wherever the peasant is turning over the clod.

So with the crows. They may not live on heather tips like the grouse, not being made that way. Nor, by reason of heaviness of wing, are they fitted to kill fresh food. Merlin and peregrine are born raiders, a part being assigned to them from whose performance they may in nowise escape. Crow and raven must take what comes their way—must pick up what the falcon leaves, must scan the slope for wounded birds, for dead or dying sheep, for the halt, the lame, and the blind. When these fail, and with no steady income, they have long spells of hunger.

Eggs and even young birds come in as dainty scraps. Such is the head and front of their offending. From that they may not be absolved. Over against a heronry on a cliff face, was a colony of jackdaws. Frequently were the herons' eggs taken. The keepers climbed the rocks, and round about the jackdaws' nests found tell-tale bits of shell. Of course the herons should have stayed more at home, or left a sentinel on guard with his bayonet-like bill. A lady sat at a window looking out on Strathearn, whose harvests were to Ruskin the most generous and lovely on earth. In the immediate foreground was a tree, and on the tree a nest. The parent

birds were absent, turning the leaves or searching the lawn for food for their young. It was an idyllic picture, into which came a dark shadow, which fell on and enveloped the nest. A carrion crow bore off as many as his feet and beak would hold.

The likeness of habit is best seen when the two are together. The crows come down to the sea to share with the gulls. They are the experter, the sharper; and where is any scarcity and competition they outwit their duller rivals. They make the better scouts. They are early up and along the shore to see what has been cast in by the last tide. One whose duty lies that way, and whose hour is the dawn, tells me that he was never abroad before the crow. Many stay all winter, some all the year round. On the back of storm, multitudes come down, as though they scented the spoils of the sea from afar.

And the gulls go up-country, not necessarily for such hours of comparative innocence and idyllic charm, at least for the onlooker, as they pass in the furrow near the windy elms and in the wake of the picturesque peasant. They are found at the feast on the hillside. Then does the lesser black-back most resemble the carrion crow, and the greater black-back the raven, when all four are at some unsavoury or nefarious piece of work.

Every one's hand is against the crow. The

kindliest of naturalists and of men tells us that he never spared the grey crow. He who protests against the destruction of hawks has no word for this double-dyed offender. And on the face of it he seems to deserve all the hard words and harder deeds. But is he so much to blame to whom nature is so stepmotherly, giving him bare lodging on the moor or in mountain corrie, and sending him out to find his own board? If the gulls are not so unpopular, it may be because they look so much whiter than they are, and their deeds are not so often seen.

I confess to a warm side to these tramps, overlooked when the others got their portions, and taught no trade whereby they might win their own food. For the gulls who watch the divers going down among the shoals till the last sand-eel stands out of their bills, and can only kick their webbed feet in impotence against the yielding water. For the crows, ousted even from the respectable society of the hawks and dubbed rascals. It is so like something we are familiar with in our own kind.

Two of our crows are not sombre, but dressed in gay attire. They are the most striking, if not also the most charming, of natives. No bird can be quite so gay as a crow. Liveliness and wit heighten the charm. Both are large enough to show the colours distinctly, in the distance at which wild birds allow themselves to be seen.

A weakness in many of the smaller species, the details of whose markings are dimmed in the shades, or merged and lost in the expanse of the open.

For the amenity lent to their haunts, jay and magpie are worth carefully keeping; but they are not kept. A very common man with no trace of what, for want of a better name, is called a soul, inherits a property, and follows out his common ideas. For some petty personal interest, the life-renter, for such he is, may destroy objects of beauty, which, though unfortunately living on his estate, are really general possessions. The by-stander can only chafe; he can do nothing. Let him keep his property for his tenure. I for one am no socialist. But hands off some things.

It is one of the weaknesses of our system to give so much away with the land, that he who owns can do anything within his march stone, except perhaps kill a man. Wherefore the restriction is not very obvious. Gurth wore a brass ring resembling a dog's collar, but without any opening, and soldered round his neck to mark him the born thrall of Cedric. Had he disappeared, no one would have asked where he had gone. We in these days respect human liberty and spare human life. It is a part of a miserable creed based on selfishness. A further emancipation is awaiting. Apart from æsthetic considerations, there is room for a wider sense of obligation—a

nobler stewardship of life. There are other thralls. The modern serfs are the wild creatures. One wonders if there is a lack of humour in his lordship, who gravely writes: "I have ordered the jays and magpies to be killed out."

On the magpie's plumage is a soft sheen, an effect in black and white, which nature alone may produce. Man could not arrange the feathers for another magpie; he can only disarrange them with a shot. And then there is the vivacity. Any atrabilious proprietor who has been put all wrong by the loss of a few pheasants' eggs may learn that it is possible to be light-hearted on very much less than he possesses; no stately dinner, but a chance bite in the covert.

The bird has a strange nest. Most like a big loose bundle of twigs, approximately circular, and pushed into the bush or tree. One must go round about it before he can make quite sure what it is. Somewhere is a hole in the side, through which the nest proper, and the eggs, if such there be, appear. If the curious would go further, he may find the entrance somewhat tortuous and the guarding twigs beset with thorns, which scratch the hand. This is supposed to be a robber's haunt, the precautions of a notorious egg-stealer to prevent reprisals. And it looks marvellous like. If it be so, then there is no shame nor delicacy. Only, petty thieves among birds are few, and in Scotland mainly confined to

the crow family. The design, therefore, is meant to deceive or puzzle those of its own kind, and quick-witted as itself. One magpie would be sure to find its way into another magpie's nest. The *chevaux de frise* may be raised against the squirrel—a noted pilferer—whose fur would catch on the thorns. Of all this the bird may know nothing. It may be but the interpretation of those who look on. The very size of the nest would challenge attention and raid. A simpler explanation may be found in the restlessness, or bizarre tastes of the builder.

Second of the gay crows is the jay; with plumage soft as an owl to brush through among the thick branches, and bluish toned to be lost in the blue woodland shadows. It is a very Puck of the shades; a most lively imp; its chatter now here, now yonder. Were there no jay, how much would one be worth for the great woodland cage?

But jays are thieves. The coverts are the areas of mischief. In Sutherlandshire they are kept down for the harm they do; the policy is liberal there. Elsewhere they are killed. Pheasants are not worth the price. Many woods, once lively, are silent, save for the jarring screech of the tame pheasant, which has no longer any wild jay to fear. After a careful watch for years over the bird life of the east coast and Perthshire, the late Colonel Drummond Hay reported that the jay was rapidly becoming scarce through

incessant persecution, and would soon be exterminated.

Throughout Scotland, the distribution of the gay crows is ragged, with many fresh rents. Less strictly a woodland bird, and better able to look after itself, the magpie is the commoner. Though here and there, especially in the Highlands, the jay persists while the magpie is absent. Where are no pheasants, the woodland crow will be less harmful.

The plea of a life for an egg, supposed to be conclusive, is not without a possible answer.

"I will use them according to their desert."

"Odds bodikins, man, much better. Use every man after his desert, and who will escape whipping?"

Even the black crows are charming in their glossy coat, with, betimes, a hood of soft grey over their heads. Their alertness passes into an amusing boldness approaching to impudence. They are interesting in a nimbleness of wit beyond that of other birds, partly the gift of their mode of life.

Wild and remote, or near and familiar, the environment is always striking. The raven to the corrie, the rook to the windy elms of the manor-house, the jackdaw to the grey old church tower, the chough to the rocky coast where the waves chafe. Even the crow lends its touch of weirdness to the bare upland pasture, where the

black-faced sheep feed on the half-wild grasses. I know not one scene of which poets have written, or where lovers of grand or picturesque nature go, that would not lose by the absence of one or other of the crows.

Their voices are not lovely, nor do they seem to offer any encouragement to cultivation. Does not Lady Nairn say, "Send a craw to the singing and still he will craw"? But strange as it may seem, the voice would be missed as greatly as their presence. Harsh as it is, unelastic and unsympathetic, a mere single cry, or equally rude chatter, it appeals to the imagination and emotion in an altogether powerful and peculiar way. The range on either side is far, as from the raven of Edgar Allan Poe to the jackdaw of Rheims. It can rouse the fears, and make each particular hair to stand on end; it can give shape to the superstitions, these nameless haunters, even of a brave and sane spirit; it can open the closet and let the sheeted ghosts come forth.

The croak at midday is ominous, how much more at midnight. Picture a group round the fire over ghost stories, and a raven appearing at the door and uttering one sound. If the croak from the corrie stirs one's blacker moods, how does the caw from over the swaying branches set one a-dreaming. Tut! tut! We know not our chief possessions. Nor have we any soul behind the ear.

And so with the gulls. There are noble forms among them. A soft play of light shades is in their plumage, grey and blue, toning the white. Quaint ways have many. In all is a majesty of flight denied to the crows. For a certain command of the wing, for motion without jerk or effort, for an almost lazy power, the gull is supreme.

Divers may be dipping beyond, or sandpipers running over the bank, but they are unseen. The gull is in the foreground and the sea beyond, that is all—the two simple elements in the seaside picture. The gull rides the waves like a white cloud, or rests on the sands at the ebb. The painter comes and puts on his canvas the sea, and then he puts in the gulls. Only that and nothing more—the sea and the gulls. If he could paint a sound, it would be the trumpeting of the herring-gull.

Just as he might go into the country and paint the grey old tower, and then fill in the jackdaws; or paint the manor-house with its rich woodlands, and fill in the rooks. If he could paint sound he would put in the idyllic caw. Just as he might look over the hedgerow and paint the field and the team and the peasant, and then fill in both gull and crow.

XV

AUGUST IN SCOTLAND

AUGUST is Scotland's month, as September is, perhaps, that of England. In one the grouse reigns, in the other the partridge. In August, Scotland appears as the joy of nations. The bustle, the portmanteaux, the fishing-baskets, the shooting-bags, all are so cheery, so hopeful, so virile. They who have been in the midst of it look forward eagerly, and backward with a sigh of regret. The story of August is the idyll of Scotland.

Natives feel all the charm without the freshness of novelty. They refrain from ecstasies because of a quiet sense of possession. Just as those who live in the sunshine are content to bask. Dwellers on the coast are not constantly snuffing up the sea-breeze. Children of the hills smile pleasantly on the eagerness of the climbers.

In August the breath of autumn is felt first, cool, but not cold. The sun shines through a soft silver, and lies golden on the golden harvest fields. In a sea of haze, cumulus masses float up

from the west. The sky is oftener grey, clouding over of an afternoon. The breeze has a trick of rising suddenly, passing through the trees with a certain metallic rattle, suggestive of the fall. The hills are misty-outlined and purple-flanked, even at midday. The landscape sobers into brown shades. The setting sun has crept round to the southern side of yonder peak. The northern twilight is less lingering, and deepens into something more nearly approaching dark.

Young willow-warblers come in about the gardens to feed on the aphides, and utter at intervals their plaintive lay, not yet fully formed. Castanet sounds are heard, and, ere the second week has passed, young robins break into their autumn song and trill delightfully. The twittering swallows feed the young on the eaves; then young and old float in the air to a sweet chorus. Anon is a gathering on the telegraph wires, and on the morrow all are gone. Far aloft the swifts scream. The young are on the wing, strengthening for the long flight, to be entered on at mid-month.

A yellow-hammer sings from the fence, but for the most part the singing has passed into something else. A charming family of whitethroats are talking to one another ever so delightfully in the bramble brake. How soft the tones even of a whitethroat can be when in its gentler moods,

and how expressive. Some of the notes seem to be telling the young I am coming up the lane, and that they must lose themselves in the shadow, or among the twigs and the leaves.

The August linnet is a charming bird; it meets us in so many places and so many ways. It seems to take possession of the countryside. Here it is everything, and everywhere. Perched on the top bar of a fence, it sings its tinkling song almost without a break. It fills more of the autumn air with music than the robin, which sings but now and then, and with frequent breaks. In the late afternoon, when the shadows are falling westward, it flies to some favourite tree or trees, where it meets other linnets, and all sing their tinkling song in chorus. Wherein it differs from the robin, which never sings in company.

Now a family of rose-linnets are bobbing high over the fence, tinkling as they go, to light on the grain-field beyond. The most charming of Scots birds finds a golden cage—whose wires are the slender stalks of the single grains—in the most charming of Scots cereals. Others may laugh at the oats, because of the free use the nation is supposed to make of it when ground. But it is hard to beat full grown, and with the head shaken free; harder still in its golden tint as now. With how infinite a grace do the pendent grains drop round a linnet. Friendships are made there—it may be as the heads sway together from the

weight. On the note of alarm, two families bob away as one.

With an evener dip in their motion, and a flight-note lower, sweeter, though not less charming—in autumn the characteristic sounds are flight-notes—pass families of greenfinches. Next to the linnet, they play the largest part in August country life. They are even more numerous, and more generally spread. They are more of a dominant species. But, inasmuch as the play of the greenfinch is less varied, as it moves about in larger or smaller groups, and seldom sits alone to sing, the linnet is more heard and felt in the scene.

From some convenient tree, the plebeian sparrows drop down on the uncut barley. If this, too, is in a sense a Scottish cereal because of its supposed popularity north of the Tweed, the nation can have no objection to acknowledge the soft impeachment, and own it. Among grains, it is second in grace to the oats alone. And it can lend of its charm even to the sparrows, as they swing on an elastic perch under the misty sweep of awns.

On level wing, a dozen or more starlings flit from place to place, or run over the pasture with inborn restlessness. The lapwings of all the countryside have gathered together, and through the afterglow and in the twilight, wheel in two great flocks against the western sky.

Mating has passed. August is the month of families. Flocking has set in intermittently, and for a purpose. It is joyous work this raiding together, this dropping down from the deep shade, this tinkling through the coloured autumn sunlight toward the golden fields. The order is not yet so close, but that a family will drop in a corner by itself. They will gather in the morning to spend the day together; they will spend the day in families to gather in the evening. So these characteristic northern forms—the finches and the buntings—pass their charming August life, to fall again, it may be, into looser order when the harvest is past, until the coming on of the cold.

More interesting to the man of sporting instincts, as distinguished from the naturalist, is the grouping of the grouse. The family is known as a covey. August is the month of coveys. It is the form that lends itself to sport. It dots the heather all over—a covey here and a covey there. When many families pack—move about in one body and gather into one place—much of the heather is barren. During the period of family life the mood is comparatively gentle. In packing, another order of instincts come into play. Reports from the moors tell that the birds are difficult of approach. The season is not necessarily over, for, under changing conditions of weather, they will pack and dissolve again.

Hill birds pack sooner than birds of the plain. Indeed, in ordinary winters, lowland birds pack but loosely, or can scarce be said to pack at all. Upland conditions are harder, the gales ruder, the storms rush down from the heights; there is less of shelter save among themselves. Mountain linnet and golden plover leave the heather for the pasture and the stubble. Grouse stay. The gusty winds of autumn ruffle, the gun decimates, the thinned family ranks seek safety in numbers and readier flight.

Were the shooting later, the packing might be later. Were the birds stronger, the skill of the sportsman must be increased. In late seasons are many cheepers, which are no fitter for the game-bag than small trout for the fishing-basket. But it is hard to break the tradition of "the twelfth," or to pass on its glow and virility. The heather would have ceased to bloom; the charm of the environment would be wanting. A change in the day and the spell might be broken, the moors might cease to attract, and Scotland might no longer be the joy of nations. So great issues hang on little things. Shooting or no shooting, August reigns queen over the hills, not less for the flush of her heather than for picturesque grouping of her red birds, midway between the mating and the packing.

Ere the month is out the stalker is abroad. Many a stag has been grassed. Those who love

the delicate bouquet, nor wish it to pass in repletion, leave the moor for the forest. The knocking over of grouse day after day does not appeal to them. They seek nobler game, go a step up the ladder.

If not a very reliable month, August fishing is very charming, and that is a good deal. From the hill burn, fringed with yellow and white saxifrages, and rushing, to the twitter of mountain linnets, through the glen stream flowing down between heather-flushed slopes, to the lowland water in its statelier course by green haughs and overhanging woods—all are equally delightful. The change of environment makes no change in the charm.

After all, the fishing depends much upon the season, so that there may be both environment and sport. This summer was dry, still, and bright. The water shrank till it dipped to the mud of slow-flowing streams, and made channels in the gravelly beds. Spring and summer were alike barren. With August the rain fell; not drenching, but just enough to flush; not continuous, but with long, bright intervals. After the rain came wind, not blustering, but strong enough to chase the flushed pools into ripples, and so add the last touch to perfect fishing conditions. The big trout rose in that determined way of theirs when feeding, sucking down the fly while scarce breaking the surface into rings.

Only yesterday, in the stream hard by, the rising was quite eager, in pleasant contrast with the sluggishness of months.

Night fishing comes earlier; indeed, it is the month of night fishing. It is no longer a waiting through an unfading twilight. One who does not care for a whole night of the stream may stroll out about eight o'clock, cast for two hours over the dimming surface, and then walk home through the dark. Perhaps the most delightful form of fishing while it lasts, and that which leaves the most charming impression. It deepens the mystery, which is the spell of the sport.

Trout are in perfect condition in August, fed upon summer flies into fatness and symmetry of mould. One is worth having. Anglers, like gunners, are too much given to the big-basket theory, to measure the day's success by the weight and often by the number. And just so far they come short of being sportsmen. My most delightful day of late only yielded one fish, but it was large, lively, and lightly hooked. With that pleasing flutter within, I watched the scouring of the line, felt the impatient tugging when he had got as much as I cared to give, followed the reluctant passage down the stream till the white side was turned up. How firm the flesh was, and what power of muscle as he curved in the hand. It was enough. With each fresh capture the delicacy of the sensation would have

weakened. Though I made a few more casts, I soon went away. Next day the charm would be fresh again.

If the fish are dainty because of the variety of the fly, and slow because of the number, all the more art is needed, alike in the choice and use of the lure. Watch an old angler—shabby as only an angler can be—who has been baffled all the morning, and only gets the keener—with his eye on the rings which the trout are breaking, to see what they are sucking down. From his book of battered parchment he takes a bare hook, and fur or feather for fresh dressing. If the lure attract where others failed, a glow comes over his face. It is better than a basketful where the trout would not be denied. I have visions of such an angler who—after barren but delightful hours—came near to Ashestiel, where he cast again, and this time not in vain. The play of the trout is passing now; the faint gurgle where the water swirled, sounds; the glow on the face shines out.

In the slight air-chill, flies are not so many. Forms drop and pass. Other forms, touched with richer shades, come in their stead, but do not quite fill their place. The heyday of insect life has gone by. Whereas the water was a maze of spinners half hidden in drowning forms, one spins or drowns here and there. As in spring, insect life awakens not all at once, but a few appear in advance. So in August it goes to

sleep, not all at once. A few remain after the rest. There is a sort of second spring, where are flies, but not enough to sate. The rise is not, as in chill April, that of hungry, half-fed trout, wherever March Brown lights, but a sullen wallop for change of diet. In a season of dry, hot, forcing weather, is a gap after the passage of summer forms—when the later insects appear, the rising is eager enough.

As a further charm, August closes the fishing. The trout have matured into their perfect mould, only to change. Though the form is generally maintained to the last day of the month, through the early weeks of September the deterioration becomes plain. Even yesterday, the 20th of August, a trout, full and perfect as trout could be, still showed a tell-tale margin of white on the fins. The season may have forced the fish as well as the flies. It was the first hint that sport was drawing near an end.

Some fish on to the last lawful day. They go by book. The angler's book is nature; he guides himself by what he sees there. As a general rule, he finds that August is as long as he cares to fish for trout. No one year is like another, so he may fish on a few days longer, or stop a week earlier, as he finds the trout slower or faster in passing their best. In no case does he care to trouble fish which have on them the marks of early spawning.

For the angler are the same divisions as in shooting. August is a precious, and somewhat of a sad month. Its weeks are numbered, then its days, finally its hours. And when the reckoning is reduced to the fingers of one hand, he might well pose for the "Knight of the rueful countenance." To have the trout at its best and yet at its latest. To be bound by that angler's conscience of his, that unwritten agreement as between him and his quarry, that debt of honour to Nature for her largesse, not to fish after the hour has struck, or the first sign of change appeared.

That last day of grey cloud and wind-chased pool; that last night of shortening twilight and early-coming dark, which—linger as he might—would come to an end. That day and night too which—as though to try to the utmost what manner of man he was—the trout rose, as they had done no other day nor night for many weeks. I have come with him along the shaded road, entered his house, and watched him place his rod on the pegs where he would see it from his arm-chair all winter through, and muse through the curling smoke on the last time of using, when the trout rose so freely in the darkening.

Coast life in August is very full and very charming. The sands are not so hot as in the earlier months. The white light of July is

pleasantly shaded and tinged, flushing the breaking waves into a delicate pink. It is then that the crowd, whose instincts are in the main right, seek the seaside; it charms and exhilarates as at no other time. Their demands are few, the conditions elemental; they give themselves up to the simple joy of living. Once a year it is well to return to nature. Mature hands splash the water in the frolic of childhood. Their natural history is confined to the donkeys up on the dry sand, which they mount for a penny ride—after the cold snap of bathing—to the ripple of the old girlish laughter. But even donkeys are part of a very delightful picture, and by no means banish other forms for those who have eyes to see.

If the bird life, on the flat stretches where the visitors go, is not so rich nor so varied as in winter, neither is it so grave. It is bright and sparkling, vivacious and sympathetic. The terns mimic the bathers, but with ever so much more perfect an art. They are sunlight, motion, virility, joy incarnate. They dive and splash, and emerge, not to shake the drops off, but with the purpose which runs through all the doings of wild life. For the children, how delightful a first lesson in nature, to have such bright associates for bathing, with whom they take dive about. They may forget many things, but scarcely the bright days with the terns among the August

ripples. If, hitherto, they have been so absorbed with their own little ring formed by chubby hands, next August let them make new friends.

Paddling in the rush of the breaking ripples are many gulls, which scarce take the trouble to get out of the wader's way. As a change in the puzzles weekly propounded in the children's corner of magazines, it might be well to ask how many different kinds of their fellow-waders there were. They can scarcely fail to make out three—the herring-gull, the common gull, and the black-headed gull. In August the difficulty is greater than at any other time, but that only makes the puzzle so much the more interesting. They are in process of changing the summer for the winter plumage. The black-headed gull is imperfectly named after its summer hood. And now that it has no longer a black head it is hard to tell. Only it is the smallest of the three, and has red legs.

Certain returning divers sail close in to add to the list. Many waders pipe along the coast, whose notes should be easy to distinguish. And altogether the circle of new acquaintances on an August day is fairly large.

In the sterner conditions of marine life flocking comes hard upon, harder even than on the hills. The three phases, moulded by the environment, are of exceptional interest. In the vast and

lonely areas of buffeting winds and warring seas, the living forms at once mass into flocks, and cling together in pairs. The family relation is no lasting phase. The solitary life is well-nigh unknown.

XVI

THE OTTER

JUST as no pure stream is without trout, so no trout stream is without otter. From the river to the rill it is found. It follows the shifting quarry into the tributaries and up the feeders. The hill burn, with the dark peaty pools overhung with heather, is occasionally visited. It crosses the land to the still ditches, swollen only by heavy rain, or flushed in times of overflow.

Perhaps its home is where a long cast can just place the tail hook on the shadow of the far side. This is known in Scotland as a "water." It likes to be within easy reach of the land, to bring its capture to the bank, to shake its fur free from the drops, to have its evening gambol on the dry grass. Too shy is it to remain long in the burn where every boy guddles, and hiding is but scant. Lately, the hounds were tried on the Kenley, a favourite trouting burn near St. Andrews, but they will not be taken back. No otter was found, and if one had been it could not have lived many minutes.

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KENLEY BURN, NEAR ST. ANDREW'S

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The water yields the proper distance and proportion of stream and land. Floods eat underneath the banks, forming dim galleries filled with the music of the passing current, with grassy projecting roofs fretted and groined, every here and there, by tree roots. From between the roots the water washes the soil, opening up tortuous passages to some inner chamber.

So the most powerful and interesting of our native wild animals passes a life varied and charming, not without times of stress; its jungle among the sedges of the shallows, its stronghold the rude islet cut off by the parting of the stream in twain, its holt the dark chamber reached by the tortuous passage through the tree roots. The outlet of the field drain is only a retreat when pressed, since a few yards back it narrows to pipes, and in rain is exposed to sudden flood.

A night feeder, it sleeps out the day in the shadows. Much as I haunt streams I have not seen one; often I have heard, and even felt it in the dark, and fished along with it in the same dim pool, where it rose with its sputtering blow. In its night habits safety dwells; it has no natural enemies. The rustic bothers not the otter, for the simple reason that the two are seldom abroad at the same time. He may try his dog, but where hounds of finer fibre fail, scant success is likely to attend the effort. If, unhappily for itself, the cur should come into grips, it will have

an ugly quarter of an hour. A master of the hunt has seen hounds go under in the otter's jaws, and reach the surface half drowned and bleeding. One never came up. The stern combatants were locked in a death knot at the bottom.

With these advantages, the otter maintains its numbers. If not more common, it is because of some law of nature, hidden from our eyes, which places a limit on the increase of wild animals. It breeds in security. The female retires into a holt, often opening under water. Some obscurity rests upon the breeding. There seems to be no special season. By the Fifeshire Eden, a pup was found dead in the July of this year. In September one was brought by the hounds from a hole in the banks of the Liddle. Another was left, giving a litter of two. A huntsman tells me he never knew more than three.

Save for his blow after a long dive, the otter is in the main a silent animal. A master had to pause a moment when I asked if he ever knew one make a sound, and then he thought he had heard a whistle in the evening. Perhaps he is not often abroad after dark, as the hunt is by day. I have met no night angler who can recall having heard it. Possibly because of the absorption in the one pursuit, or that it was mistaken for some night bird. Yet it calls, it may be to its mate, or to summon its young, or both. And its call is

something to listen for, a voice of the stream, as the piping of the golden plover is of the moor. With something of the modulated whistle of the buzzard or the kite, but far more soft, sweet, and musical. Perhaps no sound in nature is altogether so rare.

Interested persons charge the otter with depredations on their preserves, which they do not take the trouble to interpret, and use trap and gun. The number of such vandals is decreasing. Some have tried to shield the culprit by saying that he lives on frogs and other unconsidered trifles. A keeper saw two young otters on a stone waiting for breakfast. The mother was fishing, and straightway brought from the burn a good-sized trout, which her pups incontinently fell to quarrelling about. Interfering, she gave it to one of them, and once more entering the burn soon had a large trout for the other. Thus fish diet begins very early in life. What mean the salmon lying along the banks of streams or shores of lochs with the bite out of the shoulder, which seems to be all that is taken when food is abundant? Natives who know the habits of the animal are abroad in the morning to gather the remnants of the night feast for their own table.

On the banks of Sutherland streams are found complete skins of salmon, as though scooped out with a knife, probably where the otter returned to a second feast, or had a family of hungry pups

to feed. It may be an old otter, less able to fend for himself than he was wont to be, lived on the leavings of the more vigorous. Yet Sutherland remains what it has been—the paradise of the salmon fisher. No otter-haunted stream is ever short of fish, and of game fish, too, which make ever so much better sport. No true angler grudges a share, but looks on the otter as an ally rather than a rival. Nor would a life spent in the search for frogs, or even in the pursuit of the weak and diseased, have called forth the marvellous dexterity in the water.

Like most game animals, it probably rejoices in the putting forth of its power, and enjoys the pursuit as a prelude to the kill. To this end it will choose the fittest, with the promise of the longest and most baffling chase. It would have no quarrel with some other creature that kept the fish still fitter. Were speed and resource useless, half the zest of the day's existence would be gone. It is as much a sporting animal as the angler on the shore. It has been seen lying quite still on the water as though watching for the rise of the salmon after the manner of a seal. All this prepares it for a further destiny.

Not so long ago otter-hunting in Scotland rested on the enthusiasm of one man. When unexpectedly he turned up with his following at some stream—for he had the whole country to himself, and was a good deal of a nomad—the

natives regarded him as an eccentric. Now there are two important hunts. With the energy of youth the east of Scotland hunt—of which I shall have more to say further on—has entered on a somewhat busy life. I hope it may not tire. The old Dumfriesshire hunt still holds the premier place, if only for its unmixed pack of hounds.

At least, the otter hound as we have it now, resembling the truer breed but with certain points—such as the wiry ears—marking a later cross. A frequenter of the hunt said to me the other day that he could not make out where the rough coat came from. That seems to be the chief puzzle. The hound element, the slouching gait, and long pendent ears are more easily accounted for. The earlier strain seems to have been from the old English hound. Now there is a little of the look and much of the temper of the bloodhound. Gentle in the kennel, keen and bell-noted on the scent, it is the most delightful of dogs.

After an interval, when it was in danger of dying out, otter-hunting is passing rapidly into the first rank of sport. It forms a class by itself, with many distinctive features. It is the only Scottish sport under perfectly natural conditions, with nothing unreal. Artificiality is the death of sport. The otter is not shielded like the grouse, nor kept in existence where otherwise it must

have vanished—furnished with cover, and almost fed like the lowland fox. It has a domain, furnishes its own larder, finds its own holt, and passes its life partly in the shade. Otter-hunting is an undeveloped art, amid many that are played out. It leaves some things yet to be learned and achieved; which is the spell of all pursuits.

The game is played in a sympathetic arena. There is the charm of the stream, and the mystery of the depths; the low ripple, and the long shadows, as in trout and salmon fishing. There is also the interest in the pursuit of a perfectly wild creature in its native haunts, with all its inherited instincts in full play. It is not the contemplative, but the active man's sport. It is all that a sport should be, with a quite peculiar spell, an exceeding freshness. To its votaries it comes as a revelation, opens up a virgin world. Later, we may see the faces of those who look on.

As yet it is not popular in the worse sense. One fervently wishes it may never become so—that the blight of the pseudo-sportsman, who kills everything he touches, may never rest upon it. He would want to rear the otters in tanks, to put in tame fish for them to feed on, and not be satisfied unless he bagged three or four each day. But it has all the elements of a saner popularity.

Fox-hunting is for the few, and among the few is a mighty sprinkling of pseudo-sportsmen, with suggestions of a promenade and music. Not

every one can afford a horse. But most people have a pair of legs. The hunting of the mountain fox would be in the same healthy class, were it adopted into sport.

The peasant may turn aside from the furrow, leaving the patient horses to drowse away in the idle plough; the urchin peep over the boulder and forget to go to school. The angler will cast down his rod to enter into the more exciting play. Eager-faced girls will rush hatless down the slope from the drowsy life of the farm. The streamsides are our eternal right of way; a human path up which all may hurry.

A time of wakening enthusiasm has been chosen to run full tilt against sport. The croakers are of the well-known type, who periodically favour us with a Jeremiad. In one of his acute analyses, Matthew Arnold grouped a certain class as barbarians, because of their love of outdoor life and field sport. This is really the fundamental type, although socially it is at the top. Scratch a Philistine, and you have a barbarian. Only you have to scratch some very deep, because of the thickness of the moral epidermis. We were all sportsmen once. And may be again, provided it is sport and not make-believe. It is well we should be; better far than to be altogether Philistine, all epidermis.

Think of the early start, the fresh morning, the water churning white round the boulders, barred

with the long morning shadows, the swift run, the black mysterious holes under the roots. The spray and shadow lie on the spirit for a week—to freshen the dryness and soften the glare.

Then there is the absolute fair play. It is ever so much better than a tart benevolence, and lends a much-needed robustness to an enervated conscience. That lad behind the boulder may have been peppering a frog, which could not get away; or torturing a field vole, or crushing a brood of downy nestlings. Compare the dealings between man and otter, to that of man with man. The hunter, so full of enthusiasm for playing the game, may have been outwitting a fellow-being in one of the recognized ways. If but the spray of the streamside were brought to play, the game of life would be as fresh, interesting, and manly again.

Were the animal consulted, it might have less to complain of than its self-appointed advocates. The chase breaks the monotony, the too dreamy flow of a streamside existence. To be hunted is just the other side of hunting, and lends the contrast, which puts a sharper edge on life. Slumbering powers are called into play, to add to the sum of its activities. The otter, on the trail of the salmon, would be ever so much poorer but for the otter in its holt, listening to the hounds on the far bank, with a track of scentless stream between, and deciding on the next move.

To Mountain Tarn

The Fifeshire Eden is a water. A long cast reaches the sedges on the far side. The rod commands every eddy, each swirl round a boulder, or spreading ring of rising trout. Nevertheless, it is not as other streams are. It is sluggish of temper; it has no lively moods. Current does not slacken into pool, nor pool laugh into current; but pool and current are much alike. To its natural faults is added a certain fitful interference. It is nursed for the many mills. A sluice is raised and it runs high, a sluice is dropped and it vanishes down the grass blades. Perhaps no stream in Scotland is so tantalizing as that which runs along the streak of upper old red sandstone to St. Andrews bay. None with a greater number of barren days and empty creels.

The flies are of the minutest. The advice of an old angler is to put on no more than one. The gut is gossamer of texture. The delicacy of a woman's with the command of a man's must be in the casting hand. Unexciting, if picturesque, is the rough way down the stream. The drowsing currents, the dreaming pools under the lengthening afternoon shadows, keep the angler only half awake. The trout are the dreamers below. The psychological moment is where the Ceres burn ripples into the main stream, over the fossil fishes of Dura Den—sleeping a dreamless sleep, æons on æons.

There are conditions under which the stream changes its character, and a new interest is awakened in the long, still, shaded pools and sluggish currents. The water oozes out of sight through hidden aisles among the sedges, making its own music as it flows. The alder looks down at its likeness in a span of sunless water. The roots of the great white willow groin in shaded galleries to dark retreats. Rude islets break the channel in twain. By the mill—and mills have a knack of picking out the most picturesque and strongest parts of a stream—the lade surges forth into a fretted pool, for the great trout to lie in wait.

From a smoothly flowing poem of idyllic charm the scene becomes instinct with the possibilities of drama. No longer a drowsy trout stream, it is the haunt of the otter. The low murmur is broken by a bell-like cry. The loiterer pricks up his ears. The bay of the hounds makes all the difference.

On a day in July the music was heard of the anglers who were out. It was an exciting day, with incidents worth recording. I was absent, but write from the tale of those who were there. By and by I shall tell of other days when I was abroad with the rest.

For a while the Eden was at its rudest. The hounds got on a darg, and for well-nigh an hour dusted the quarry over an islet. The spectators

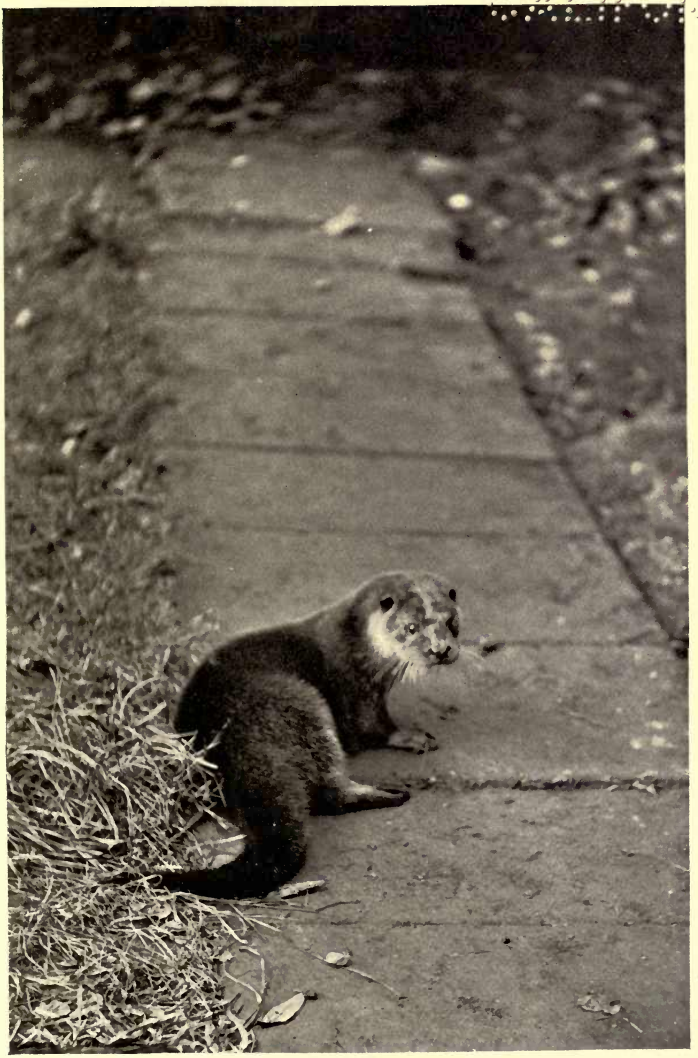

Photo. Chas. Reid

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are said to have hit the otter with their walking-sticks as it brushed past. Making all allowance for the excitement, and to some the novelty of the moment, it is plain that they ought not to have done this, when it had enough to do with the dogs. That, at least, is not sport; and until they can control themselves it might be as well that they should stay away. Nor is it sport so to crowd a hunted animal in a narrow place, that it has no free play for its instincts or local knowledge.

In their eagerness and curiosity to see, the ladies waded through the stream. Those who go to a water hunt should be prepared to wade, seeing that the quarry may be now on one side and now on the other. In this case the *dénouement* happened on an islet cut off from either bank. It was very plucky of them. But when it reached what comes after death their courage failed, or their delicacy came to the surface, which was also very proper. Some of the details proved unpleasant after it had ceased to matter to the otter.

The presence of ladies comes as somewhat of a shock to our pictures of the form at the distaff and the sampler frame. For my part, I do not see why they should not take a modified interest in sport, so long as it is sport, and not butchery. The open-air life of the barbarian has something to offer to the wives and daughters of the

Philistines, who have dwelt too much behind blinds.

For out-of-door life there must be out-of-door interest. A country walk is too placid, too uneventful, and is apt to shorten back to the distaff. Something is needed that will take to wild places at unwonted hours. The charm of environment is vivified by the chase. Emotion ebbs and flows with the changing fortunes of the drama. It may even be a ruder way of taking one out of one's self or one's own kind, and awakening an interest in the world of wild creatures. Anything is better and kinder than indifference.

A delight alike in the wit of pursuer and pursued, a readiness to rejoice alike with the dog in its capture and the otter in its escape, are all healthy enough, and not necessarily the monopoly of one sex. It has been said that when a woman does not shrink from pain she learns to love it, and ceasing to be tender becomes cruel. She lacks that perfect balance which makes the indulgence in sport safe.

Surely a little leaning to the otter is feminine, and might tend to counteract man's leaning to the dog, which is not sportsmanlike. The love of a bloodless close is surely a higher type than that which thinks it a barren day on which was no kill. I should be sorry indeed if any woman struck the otter with a stick or looked on without a glance of protest. A huntsman's main duty is

to see that space and law are lent to every hunted animal. In no contest is it considered good form to go within the ropes, or in any way hamper either combatant. And it is conceivable that the presence of woman would help in this matter. She might even stand in the water while mere man blocked the islet paths and helped to give the otter away to the dogs.

A second otter was started. She did not suffer herself to be crowded to death. After a few turns over the islet, she took to the water. A resourceful brute, she showed the chase some of the secrets. She was game, and kept the hounds at bay among the sedges. Then she made down the stream, and died in deep water, as an otter should. It was a hounds' day, and therefore not a barren one. The otter's turn would come; the triumph of wild instincts over training.

To those who looked on, that pool where the day's work closed will never be the same again. Nor will the Eden regain its old placid and uneventful flow. The eye will wander from the lazy current where the trout freshen their gills, and the still water where they fatten, to that dark hole beneath the bank, the islet stronghold beyond the fretting channel and the tail of the mill-rush, where the otter comes at even in hope of a big capture.

On the stream are three reaches of mammal life. Not sharply marked but overlapping. The

mammals increase in size as do the divisions of of the water. The banks of the upper reach where play the lazy wheels of the meal mills are tunnelled by the voles. In the estuary and as far as the tidal waves come, the seal follows the salmon. And all between, where the Eden runs the width of a water, is the haunt of the otter.

XVII

DAYS WITH THE OTTER HOUNDS

A CHARMING morning was that of the 13th of September. Early autumn so revealed herself, that she could be mistaken for no other season of the year. In beads, the dew was on the grass. Through a tender grey mist, the sun shed a rayless light. Anon, it edged the clouds with a dazzling glory. On coming forth, it glinted, rather than shone, with the steady glare of summer. The glint was on the leaves, over the great turnip field, between the dark furrows. In shadow, the fences and the corn stooks fell far across the stubble. In shadow, the sedges trembled in the pools. A freshening wind chased the water into silver-tipped ripples, ever and anon darkened by the veiling of the sun.

The meet was at a quaint mill. Old enough to be picturesque, it was called the new mill. Like most of us, it was younger when christened. In the yard, the field—more than half ladies, fresh as morning, and fitly toileted—were pleasantly

grouped around the dogs. The red coat of the huntsman gave a touch of colour. The hounds were a somewhat mixed lot. From the low setting, self-colour, shaggy hair, and long pendent ears, one at least was an otter hound; he was the noblest and most interesting. The slouch, greater height on the legs, and lakes of colour revealed the strain of the foxhound. Some three or four were Welsh.

I had a chat with the huntsman. By the way, he was characteristic, with no superfluous height nor flesh; dry-mannered, civil-tongued, a master of his craft, with an eye on his charge, while he answered a question. Such an one as it would be interesting, on the evening of a kill, to hear singing, "We all went a 'untin' to-day." His experience was that the otter-hound is wanting in stamina. It is so with other more or less pure strains — the deerhound, for instance. "That one has any amount of stay in him." And he pointed to a dog with the colour patches of a foxhound ancestry. Perhaps the crosses are not so loyal to the craft, and need the crack of the whip to keep them at the work. There was a tendency to shirk, and slip out of sight, in the undergrowth, not seen in the otter-hound.

The field went down by the mill-race. The hunt kept away round the bed of the stream; all day it followed the natural channel, even when almost dry, from the water being diverted, to one

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or other of the many mills. The hounds scattered to their work, each acting for itself, and along with the rest. Little crowding or overlapping was there. Some kept on the grass, to pick up the scent of any otter that may have come up that way, from its favourite fishing-ground, in the early morning. One swam under the far bank, brushing the long floating grasses, and plashing through many sedges. While heads showed above water, ploughing the pool to reach the hither side. When the long silence told no tales, and the lack of events was blunting the keenness of the hounds, the huntsman's horn brought the pack together.

No hiding-place so cunning as to escape their search: the noses were everywhere. The unrehearsed incidents of the hunt were interesting. Ousted from her moist retreat, the water-hen rose heavily, and, with trailing, dripping legs, passed over the water. On the ridge behind, scurrying rabbits were silhouetted against the sky. To the imagination was left, to picture the confusion of startled trout underneath.

Beyond the meeting of the waters, the full stream entered beneath the trees. The next half-mile was den. A den is a narrow strath, where the banks sharply, sometimes abruptly, slope, and are more or less wooded. No den can be more delightful than those of the Eden. Nor any Eden den than this. Broken by pro-

truding roots, the path wound in and out among the trees. Through the foliage, the field looked down upon the hunt. To know the full meaning of that, one needed to be there. The leaves trembled in the fresh breeze, which found a free passage down the avenued stream path. Filtering from above, the pure September sunlight edged each leaf with the brilliance which margins a cloud. All together moved on the face of the waters, chasing the still pool into light and shadow, and making the current doubly charming, in its double ripple.

And in this fairyland—which, happily, one does not need to go from earth to see, but only out of the highway—the drama was being enacted. In these still, yet trembling pools, in the currents which pass along under the trees with a double motion, the hounds swam, startling the water-hen amid the glorified sedges; while the red-coated huntsman stood knee-deep, or to the gilt buttons on his back, sometimes tooting the horn, with its strange sporting note.

Some of the groupings in this environment were pictures. All of them, in fact, since the scenes made them so. Common indeed must that have been which did not seem uncommon. Little knots of interested lookers-on, from the rude woodland pathway, peered through leaves at the light and shadow playing on pool and current, over the hounds. I care not what

brought them there, or what they saw, they would not go away quite the same. However opaque the outside, the leaves must have trembled through on to the spirit. For once in their lives, and from the point of view of the huntsman in the stream, they themselves were pictures.

One slight girl was busy with a hand camera of the most modest dimensions. I hope she was successful, though I am afraid not, since some of the way was too shaded for such instantaneous work. If she sees this, she will learn how I envied her even her toy. The faintest blurred presentment would still have been worth having. Though nothing may give back the infinite freshness of morning in the woods, when the shadows are actually playing on a scene instinct with drama.

In two main fretting currents, the water parted round a rough islet. It is a stream of islets because a stream of mills. These islets seem born of the unequal flow over the dam. This might be known as the islet of the wood. Half a dozen brawling streamlets broke it up into so many pieces. Huge boulders strove to keep their heads above the long grasses and storm-rent bushes. In the rude channels and through the rank growths, hounds appeared and vanished. From the vantage of a stranded trunk, the master watched and directed. Over all, the lights and shadows played with a bewildering complexity and charm.

A ripple of excitement passed over the field. The hounds were speaking out. The voice of the otter-hound played with a drum-like beat on the heart. It was in sympathy with the scene: the note of the streamside chase. A hound with a deeper, more bell-like note had been left in the kennel for the day. The music of the crosses was harshened into a prolonged bark. A hot darg was followed to a culvert or mouth of a drain. No darg led away. The otter had entered and had not come out. A spade appeared on the scene. The drain led too far back, and the quarry sat tight. The hunt turned up stream. Miles were covered, away to the haunts of the water vole. Nothing more appeared. At midday the dogs were drawn off.

"The fact is, there ain't so many otters as they talk about, or they'd have left the mark of their feet or some'at behind them on the stones." Such was the huntsman's comment. "It ain't the dogs' fault." That was his grievance; to see his charge turning tail on a bloodless hunt. So far he was right; the dogs did well. Perhaps he was unjust to the stream and the quarry. It was an otter's day, and none the less pleasant on that account. The wit which eludes is quite as interesting as that which overcomes. Together they make sport. The hunt came not within sight of a tragic close.

The eighteenth differed, as one charming

autumn morning differs from another. Typical of September, both were woven of filmy threads to like delightful issues. Low down on the eastern horizon, a crimson haze told of the lately risen sun. A cool moist touch was in the still air. More than half the sky was mackerel-scaled, hinting at a possible freshening as the day went on. The grey of the stubble passed into the purple-shadowed ridge to the south. The northern sky was of a cold forget-me-not blue, and over the pasture was a grey-blue light, with a touch of the pearl of dawn.

Far down, in the broader reaches of the stream, by tidal waters, common to the otter and the seal, was the start. Though passing from the richly-wooded inland to the treeless and sandy estuary, the scene had attraction of its own. We dropped down through the pasture field, with the eager hounds on in front, under the eye of master and huntsman. The course of the stream might be traced, on either hand, in a sinuous line, marked by the bank-enriching waters, somewhat checked, perhaps, by the kiss of the tide.

Working men were spending the week end—Monday being a holiday—with the rod. Four full-grown fishers, and among them but a little tent. Questioned as to how they managed to sleep, where was only room enough for one—"One at a time," was the answer. The stockinged legs of the man in possession protruded from the open-

ing. Dark was the busy time. Fishing was all night long. At this early hour of the morning, the baskets were fairly well stocked. In the shortening autumn twilight, the rise set in and sport began. Sea trout abounded. Nor had they it all to themselves. Other, and still keener night fishers, were there. For fellow-sportsmen they had three otters, almost as many as the men. This was hopeful, and no less hopeful than true.

Soon the hounds found where the otters had been on the bank. The music sounded. And a hot darg led up the tidal waters. It was exhilarating to hear the streamside music, to feel the ringing in the heart. The deeper bell tones showed that the old dog had joined the pack. A like bell, only higher pitched, rang in the throat of the second hound. The crosses' bark was prolonged into a howl.

The camera was present, only the hour was early, the light grey, the scene shaded, and the presentment dim. Over a loose and decayed dam of stones the stream broke, spreading into a charming waterscape, and parting to isolate a piece of land. Islet and shimmering pool were set in a high bank with a semicircular sweep of white willows. Through the maze ran or swam the dogs. In the midst stood the red-coated huntsman. The otter had retired up one or other of two culverts, where nothing could reach him.

Nydie dam checks at once the upcoming tide and the down-running stream. It is the meeting-place of otter and seal, though the former goes among the sea trout. The curving in the still deep stretch of checked fresh water is striking. The loops, in three or four parallel lines, almost touch, and by a little more fretting of the banks would merge. Two skiffs might sail separated by a neck of land, over which a biscuit could be tossed. It is a miniature of the winding of the Forth below Stirling.

Round the loops the hunt wound its picturesque way. And as it moved the scene became increasingly richer. Trees gathered to the waterside, now narrowing the horizon to the single pool which the dogs were working, again opening leafy vistas, charming bends, or glimpses of autumn fields. Through much of this streamland passed the hunt, without a note from the hounds. Freed from the strain of dramatic incident, the field might yield to the environment. So we came to where the Ceres burn enters the Eden. A veteran, who had lived much by the streamside, had many tales to tell, bearing on the doings of the day; there be fish tales and otter tales. Two had sat, one on either side of him as he plied the rod, while a third balanced itself on the floating weeds. One wondered if the three were water voles.

Soon the dogs picked up the scent. The

veteran was avenged of the sceptics. The environment was forgotten, the drama was everything. The darg led to an islet; of all we had seen, the most capable of a prolonged siege. On the main bend were deep overhanging banks, with gnarled old trunks hollowed out by age and storm. Breast high, flapped the great rhubarb-like leaves of the butterbur. The water was low.

From the far side, beyond the leaves, the huntsman "Tally-ho-ed." There the lesser limb of the stream hugged the base of a steep bank, and had fretted a long tunnel, whose roof was bound by the spreading tree roots. The darg was hot indeed. The bell-notes of the otter-hounds rang through the prolonged howl of the crosses. Over the islet, hidden by the big leaves, careered the hunt. "Tally-ho! he has just passed me, and a big dog-otter too."

"Tally-ho!" cried one of the anglers who had joined the hunt, as a dark form vanished amid the climbing woodbine and rank herbage around the base of a great trunk at the lower part of the island. "Tally-ho!" came in a lady's clear treble, as he showed his nose above the muddied water of the larger limb of the stream. Perhaps I am too fastidious. But is it quite fair, in a contest between dog and otter, for the field—who place themselves well-nigh at every point of vantage, and are, at best, only accidents of the hunt—to

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tell the whereabouts of the pursued? It is much as though the looker-on at a children's game of hide-and-seek told where the hider was. All the wild animal was loose in the dog, all the savage in man and woman. One who heard from the distance said it was the howl of a menagerie.

There came a lull. Busy but silent, the dogs crossed among the great elephant-eared leaves, swam in the muddied bend of the stream, plashing through the sedges, and nosing under the tree roots. The sporting toot of the horn called them back to the tunnel in the far bend whence they started.

"Piper," one of the wiry-haired terriers, started on a little hunt of his own. His restless energies wanted employment, which his nimble wits found. It was like the clown amid the serious business of the ring. He was after a water-hen. Undaunted by the unequal match of legs against wings, he dogged its heavy flight, marked where it lit among the sedges or crept up through the tall grass. And finally, came down with it in his mouth.

"Tally ho!" That bell-like note again, that drumstroke on the heart. The smile on the faces changed to another look. The terrier dropped his game. The water-hen hobbled painfully off with a broken wing, to play another part later on. Bedlam once more broke loose. Through the great elephant-eared leaves careered

the hunt, howling as it went. Again the dark form vanished by the woodbine-cushioned trunk at the lower end of the island. It reappeared. The hounds were hard upon it. Almost together they reached where the two branches of the stream meet at a shallowing or ford. They rolled and splashed in a heap. The dogs were uppermost. It was a kill. The otter slid from under into the deep water.

The music subsided, but not the strain. Outlook and expectation were alike tense: conditions under which anything may happen. One excited old party seemed to have lost his wits. "There, there! Tally ho! Tally ho!" His eyes were starting; but that he was bald, his hat would have risen on his head. The field gathered round, eagerly watching the wagging and pointing finger. "A blessed water-hen!" cried the huntsman drily. Piper's catch was crawling up the bank. "Who Tallied?" came the stern challenge from the master. The culprit's eyes were fixed upon his boots; he was markedly silent for the rest of the hunt. "Three of you were at it together, in different parts of the field." So it was. The intoxication was general. Men saw visions.

There was reason for protest. It was unfair to the huntsman, the master, the dogs; it drew them away from their proper work. It made of the hunt a sort of general thing, a farce. The

way to put it down is to say, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, you will understand that this is a matter between the dogs and the otter."

Almost a hounds' day that in which the quarry was rolled over. Well-nigh a tragedy, and would have been wholly one, but for an ally that came to the otter's aid. The muddied stream crept up the sedge blades and floated out the higher grasses. Some of the mills had opened the sluice, and set free the pent water of the dam. And so the holes under the tree-roots were sealed from the dogs. Perhaps the hunt is at its best so, with all the excitement of a chase without the satiety of a kill.

XVIII

FROM WEASEL TO PTARMIGAN

THE sun beat down pitilessly. The heat was dry and blistering. The air shimmered up from the hot earth. The hills rose around like the sides of a great oven, roofed in with a cloudless hard blue. The stream was visibly shrinking with a margin of damp, which the water had just left behind.

From its fleshy leaves rose the bold flower of the orpine. The great willow herb hung out its disc-like blossoms. So bright shone the investing heather that the patches of rose appeared among the purple. The environment was charming, save for the exhaustion of the water, the thirst of the dry channel, and the shadowlessness of the self-shadowing hills.

I turned aside into a piece of rough meadow; the grass was brown, the soil cracked. I lay down with my face from the sun. Save for the blistering about the neck, a siesta would have been delightful. I was just dropping over, when my ear caught a sharp scream. Strange how significant are these elementary sounds—how

close wedded to their cause. The emotions themselves seem to cry out. I knew that something was in fear. The wish to help would have brought me to my feet, when the cry sounded nearer. The yellow blades stirred.

A dark form scurried past. I could see the blunt nose and short tail of a field vole. I might have touched, almost breathed upon it. So completely did some greater fear swallow the less, that I must have appeared as a protector. I watched for the enemy. The sinuous motion of the grass had all the significance of a shadow. I waited. With nose down, the weasel came in sight. We surveyed each other. The weasel asked me what I was doing there. So keen was he that he took a step or two forward. The trail lay past my head, much too near for his liking. He was disposed to be vicious at first, and retired reluctantly.

It is a human impulse, of late growth, to protect the fearful and the weak; but how far a healthy one is not so very clear. Plainly I was an intruder on the meadow. I came between Nature and her work. The weasel was right. In so far as in me lay, I put the machinery out of gear. I did my little all to disturb the balance. But for me the weasel would have had the vole. The vole is a grass feeder. Moreover, it is a great breeder. Its many young would grow up to feed on grass. The weasels on the meadow

are no more than enough to keep them in check. To stop one weasel from his prey is to give the vole an advantage, which Nature does not think it wise to give.

A passing keeper would have shot it, because it destroys game. Nature does not pay his wages. There is much of this lob-sided work going on. I was on the side of the gamekeeper. I knew better; only the judgment was blinded by the emotions. Probably no harm was done. The weasel would circle round, and when he had got beyond me, would cross and recross to pick up the scent, with more than the skill of a trained pointer.

As I lay, my eye wandered on and up to the slow powerful flight of a bird on the wing. Nature has no surprises. Whatever comes into the scene takes its rightful place there. It is another touch to the picture. There are subtle links of connexion. It is there, because it has something to do. The bird was circling over the rough stretch, between me and the base of the hill. The circle seems characteristic of the eagles and the hawks. It was one of them. In the distance I knew it for a buzzard.

Lost against the slope, I could not follow its doings. Near by, where it vanished, was a riven pine. Doubtless it was foraging. It is now so rare that I, who am so much abroad, had not seen one for long. It may have lighted on some bare

limb of the pine to watch. It has the flight of an eagle and the hunting habits of an owl.

I walked across that way. On a tumbled heap something was moving. The creature was too busy to notice me. If the buzzard, then it had got prey. If the rascal, then he was caught red-billed. The catch was very innocent; much the same as that of the weasel. No one would have cared to take it away. Need it be told over that no creature exists more fitted to keep in check the smaller rodents, so that they may not become a plague? A servant he, who works while man sleeps. Had the buzzard been killed while he was a-hunting, there would have been one pest the more. As it was, there was one the less.

After a climb I rested, where the moraine stones are piled up and half hidden in hill ferns. I looked down on the glen, to where the stream wound along its course; as from the glen I had looked up on the hills. The air was fresher. A light breeze played fitfully. The rose-bay willow herb lifted itself high from the stones, as its sister beside the water. Golden rod bravely bore its golden spike. All around spread the bracken.

In such a scene, so remote, one has only to be quiet, and the wild creatures will come out of their hiding, go through part of the daily round, tell some of the secrets of their life. In course of time, one gets into the habit of being quiet

and waiting. It is the first simple equipment of a student of nature, who would no more think of talking, or being restless, than if he were in a church. If in an empty church, he would be quiet, so that the church mouse might play about his feet.

One may escape many things in the wilds, but not the world's cry of pain and fear. The same drama was to repeat itself. Pursued and pursuer were a little larger, but that was the main difference. In a sense, a big vole was being tracked by a big weasel.

A rabbit came from under the fern leaves. Though fearful of an enemy behind, he was not going fast. A paralysis lay on limb and spirit alike. He too, who at another time would have run from me, passed close by and dragged himself out of sight. From beneath the same frond the stoat appeared. The same little by-play went on; the daring, questioning look.

Again I was in the way, alike of the stoat and of nature; for there is no distinguishing between them. Rabbits, too, eat grass, and are prolific breeders. Were there no check, they would soon need the country to themselves. Nor could all the stoats do more than keep them in their place. That man finds some use for rabbits has no significance. The original plan simply provided for the due control of one wild species by another, and the survival of that best

able to look after itself. Nor does the blindness of man render the adjustments of nature less necessary, nor the turning of the gun against the stoat less barbarous.

The larger weasel alters his hue. That means that he is a more northerly species, or as far as our own country is concerned, that he dwells in ruder places and a little further up the slope. A white coat—against the rain-darkened soil of an open winter on the plain—would be a danger to the dwellers there, and an indictment against Nature. Very rarely, from causes that are obscure, the lesser weasel is found white. The albino is known in many other species whose habitual coat is of sober hue. It seems to point to some common source, it may be a very distant reversion. In the case of the weasel, it may arise from a cross. These are exceptional. The change that makes the summer stoat into the winter ermine may have one of two meanings.

The primal use is to make the wearer invisible, or hard to detect on a sheet of snow. This explains why the change occurs in winter, and fixes the haunt where snow habitually lies. Against so pure and uniform a background, a differently toned object must be easily seen, and would find no place of concealment. Much more readily would it be seen than on the snowless hillside, amid whose varied toning, hues might be found in accord with its own.

Were the hues to remain dark, the pursuer would be seen by the pursued at a longer distance away, and the chances of capture be much lessened. The struggle for a living would become harder, it may be beyond the line of hunger to starvation. When by a process of selection the coat becomes white, the balance is restored. Once more has the pursuer a fair chance of capture.

Where snow lies, pursuer and pursued become white; that is only fair. It is not so with the rabbit; which seems to show that the ermine has come beyond his natural limits and is an interloper, or that living forms are very much mixed in this land of ours.

The winter white may be meant to conceal from enemies and give a fair chance of escape. Easily seen, a dark object is easily captured. In its turn pursuer is in the place of pursued. There is something pathetic in this change of coat. It shows what care Nature has of her own, how catholic she is. With an infinite fair play she colours alike; both are her children. She is the mother of sportsmen; her training is robust. Not that the stoat has many enemies, no weasel has. It is powerful and dangerous out of all proportion to its size. No enemy save man, who will break in on the arrangement in his heedless way; or women and lords, who have a use for the fur.

Still further up the hill, and the drama is gone over for a third time. The actors are only larger, as the stoat was larger. The mountain hare, in a sense, is only a bigger rabbit. If not a weasel, the hill fox is still a carnivore, and therefore not very far away.

In this case the pursued puts on winter wear when the hills do, or ought to do; seeks safety in sympathy with the background. A semi-Arctic variety of the common hare, it differs in range, and therefore in its change of coat. It is at home in the snow. Unlike the rabbit on the lower slopes, it turns white. Unlike the stoat, the pursuer is of darker winter hue.

The red mountain fox leaves the white ermine below. The would-be stealthy approach is betrayed by a tell-tale purity. In so far it is handicapped in the game of lose or win, placed at a disadvantage in the struggle for existence. Our winters are not always Arctic. Where fox and hare dwell is not always white. Storm lashes across, and they are dark. When dark, the hare is left naked to its enemies. So the balance is kept shifting. Perhaps the fox is shrewd enough to have no quarrel with his red coat, and the hare might, on the whole, be safer without his white one.

On the rough pasture, down by the glen stream, the red weasel pursues the dark vole. When the snow comes, the pursuer changes not his coat.

No weasel does. Not the marten nor the polecat; save one. The stoat is the upland and Arctic form. In summer of a weasel hue; in winter it puts on the lordly ermine, and so moves like a sinuous ghost among the sandy-coloured rabbits. The Lowland fox climbs up the mountain side and remains red. And finding the land good for food, stays in the selfsame belt with the variable hare, which changes to white in the winter, and lopes away over the snow. All this is very interesting when it becomes clear.

In much the same belt as the hare and the fox is the grouse. Neither a Lowland form which has crept up there, nor a hill form which takes on the winter white, it comes midway between. It is a sub-Arctic; it once turned white. It settled on the Scottish hills, and found it good not to turn white. How that came about we may learn elsewhere. So, season in, season out, it became the red grouse. In the selfsame belt, therefore, are the unchanging fox, the variable hare, and the grouse, which varied once, but has ceased to vary.

Above this belt — beyond the heather and where the Alpines thin out to their rarest—dwells, in somewhat solitary state, the ptarmigan. It is Scotland's Arctic bird, passing in charming detail through the fascinating changes of protective shading. Of all our birds ptarmigan is the most strangely lovely, and of all sports ptarmigan-

shooting has the greatest spell—especially ptarmigan-shooting in winter.

It is our snow bird. Perhaps the only form where the change is vital and likely to be lasting. The variable hare may cease to vary ; the stoat come to wear its weasel red all the year round. Where conditions are milder both are reluctant to lay aside their common wear. Ptarmigan will scarcely change. It dwells on the summits. It chooses the highest hills. Not far from the snow-line these summits wear a cap of white, when the grouse-belt is bare and the glen dark. And somewhere in that cap of snow the ptarmigan winters.

Thus a thin white line runs up the hill fauna, from base to summit. From the stoat, through the variable hare, to the ptarmigan. These three are children of the north, wear the livery of the snow. They represent our waning Arctic life. In two it is only a survival. No climate of ours at their altitude would ever have exacted a winter white. When they have followed in the wake of the grouse, the ptarmigan alone will be left.

On the summit is often a cairn or pile of loose stones. Not as the moraine, dropped by the old-time glacier, nor shed by the natural disintegration of the rocks. They are brought together and heaped up by the labour of man. Often they are meant as guides for those who are abroad on the hills.

Still as is the cairn-topped mountain summit, charming in its weathering to the lichen hues of the ptarmigan's summer plumage, it is capable of bringing forth something larger than a mouse. It has often an interesting fauna of its own. Dramatic incidents happen, with or without witness, at some of which I have been present. The fox is found there, the badger beside him, in a strange but picturesque partnership. From the opening of the lair, a pair of eyes are fixed on a bird, which, to dull human sense, is but a part of that on which it rests.

From its poise the eagle looks down with a glance keen enough to separate bird from stone. Rivals they: the situation intense. The fox in the cairn, the eagle aloft, and the lichen-tinted bird against the lichen-tinted stone, with its silent appeal to nature. And what an arena! Cloud and sky: mountain beyond the shadows, dwarfed glen, and distant gleam of water.

Surely artists do not know where to go for stirring events or noble scenes. Nor naturalists for those psychological moments when wild life is greatest and most itself; they dabble about hedge sides with cameras and snap at sparrows. Nor sportsmen, to learn what pictures they blot out in their lowlier sphere of influence, by the vivid interest and silent grandeur of scenes and forms beyond their everyday reach.

XIX

ON WILDER WING

THERE is exhilaration in the very thought of wild-fowl. The name was, and in the main is, confined to certain forms to distinguish them from tame fowl and from those intermediate types which serve the uses of sport. They are not game. No law protects, no sentiment hallows them. But, like other nomads, a wayward life has taught them to look after themselves.

Bohemians of sport, they have fitful moods and ways, which fall within no conventional lines. Tramps, they camp one night here and another there, with a wild freedom of movement which only long observation may reduce to a certain loose order. To the evening and the morning flight a yearly flight is added. Quite a number of wild-fowl are migrants. It is part of their restlessness. A wild impulse bears them over the sea. Some would yawn themselves to death, year in, year out, on the same hillside, by the same heather.

Strait-laced sport looked askance at them, as

convention always does at the unconventional. It took them not under its private umbrella, though earth took them under the canopy of the sky. It might shoot one that came in the way, perhaps to empty the gun, as it might shoot a weasel, but was not serious. It picked the creature up with a certain half-unwilling admiration of its shape and hues, and hesitated whether or no to drop it into the bag. In moor, field, and covert it was neither game nor quite vermin; neither to be petted nor quite killed out.

Mire snipe nest on the moors, and rear broods there. The bird that rose, wildly as a sudden breeze, when grouse were few, and sportsmen on the way down the hill, needed a sharp aim and a nice judgment. Once, twice, thrice, they tried, and failed. The zigzag movement was so puzzling. A wild challenge came back from the vanishing forms. "You can hit a lumbering grouse," it seemed to say, "but this is beyond you." It was very irritating; they would try again. So they fired till they hit, and still fired, till they mastered the art of hitting. It became interesting, made good practice, and was matter of boast over a pipe in the evening. One told me the other day that he had killed snipe with right and left. He spoke with justifiable pride, but without the gravity with which he summed up the bag of grouse.

If the month be September, and part of the

moor marshy, there may be matter for rarer boast. The jacksnipe will be back. They are close-lying birds, with a habit—disconcerting to the beginner—of springing up just under the dog's nose, and within a few feet of the sportsman.

So, in the covert, when a touch of frost was on the ground. There is all the difference in the world in hitting a pheasant rising heavily to the branches, or driven across some clear space, and catching a woodcock, as it flits from shadow to shadow, or appears for a moment against the sky over the tree-tops. There was an irresistible temptation to fire. To fire and miss, and fire again; and not be satisfied with less than three hits out of four. The mystery, the surprise, the uncertainty, all wove themselves into the web of excitement, with its woof of charm, and a couple of brace were something to be proud of.

The other day the young laird was out with his two liver-coloured Irish spaniels. I watched him as he crossed the turnip field. The sound of shooting came from the further distance. At midday he brought in his bag. Among the many partridges came forth lighter birds, with the golden-spotted plumage. Occupants for a little of the same bag, the two were not of the same order. A chance shot had brought them down. "What an expanse!" said the shooter. And he pulled out the wing to its full extent,

opening out the black and golden-barred flight feathers. They might not be partridges, but they had a wild grace and were hard to hit.

It seemed an easy shot when the wild duck flapped away. But the bird kept on. The same shot would have brought down a partridge. It seemed to be hit, from the scattering of feathers, or was it a mist of vanity? The coat must be thick, or the flight faster than it seemed. He tried again with heavier metal; and yet again, till he could measure the distance. The spell was upon him. In the new world of wild-fowl was a charm, found neither in tame fowl nor in the intermediate game. Sport had passed through a new birth, and was once more virile. By day was a wilder play of wings; at night a mixed bag and a fresh story.

Even in the time of eternal grouse, pheasant, and partridge, when all else was heresy, were sportsmen, who, while taking their share in orthodox sport, found the charm of the year in being among the wild-fowl; in visiting their haunts, in knowing their ways, in taking the chance of a hit or a miss. And in trudging home from marsh, lake, or seashore, tired and wet, bedraggled and happy.

One points out how Scott seems to have been ignorant of the charm of wild-fowling, when he bemoans the inaction of snowclad winter, and the emptiness of out-of-door life. Perhaps Scott

was not an all-round lover of nature. And Marmion might have been all the lighter without these depressing introductions to the cantos. Far from welcoming the busy day and social night, in the city, such weather would at once have allured me to the wildest shooting within my reach.

"I light my pipe," said another, "and look out for the mallards. The bay is nearly half a mile off, but I can see the ducks between me and the sky, almost as soon as they leave it. At first a solitary pair or two come silently and swiftly, probably making their way to some favourite spring further inland. With the help of a cartridge I bring down a brace from a great height as they pass over. In the hard frost I get a number by waiting for the last hour of light, near some open place on the loch or stream where they come to feed. On my way home from shooting, when I have been in the direction of the swamps, I often do this, and generally succeed in filling my bag with mallard and widgeon."

This was written in 1848. All the freshness and charm are in the passage, all the virility, all the difference between wild and tame sport. This is being slowly taken in. The eye is brightening, the long breath being drawn that fills the half-stifled lungs. The touch of nature is here, that—given time—makes all kin. Your ordinary man is usually sixty years behind.

Indifference passed, sport entered on this

delightful arena of fresh breezes with freshening rains, or still crisp frosts which stiffen the sedges and put an edging of ice around the lakes. The bird was welcomed as is some strange, half-understood genius, by society—say of grouse and partridges. If still a Bohemian it was a favoured Bohemian. A little wild-fowl shooting became a fashion. There was no ritual such as gathers round conventions; we do not waste courtesy on outsiders. There was only the freemasonry of the gun. There was no red-letter day. No season. Wild-fowl have all seasons for their own: from August away round with the sun till March. The height, perhaps, is about the winter solstice.

The cry was for more; how familiar that cry has become! To have them at command; to be able to invite the house-party to a little wild-fowl shooting. The difficulty was to command them, so fitful were the moods and divers the wants of the varied and indefinite group. Water was an attraction for many fowl. Where was a lake, the wild-fowl gathered; where was none, it must be made. Each aimed at his own duck-pond.

Nature is a niggard; she does not favour private battues. Even on a natural loch wild-fowl were sparse.

The solution was at hand, and might have struck any schoolboy. The natural haunts of the wild-fowl were invaded. The nests were

robbed. The eggs were brought to the scene it was desired to enrich, and hatched out there.

The broods were carefully reared. A man with a bag, not unlike that of a sower in a grain-field, or the hen farmer feeding his chickens, went his rounds. The young took to what they were intended to mistake for their native water. When all were afloat, the view, so much more generous than nature, enlivened the spirit of the experimenter. It was plain they could be tamed. The wild-fowl nested where they were reared. They were faithful as curses in coming back to their owners, and of much the same moral complexion. Wild ducks sat while the man with the bag attended to their wants, just as domestic ducks would do with the hen wife. It is by no means certain that some of them did not cross with the ducks of the cottages round about, to make the progeny still more amenable to discipline.

All this just shows how men are attracted by the charm of a pursuit, and then proceed to kill that charm out—how they think they will improve upon nature ; and, deceived by the near success, are blind to the more distant failure. Sport, virile at the first, interesting in the wild resourcefulness of the quarry, and the keenness of the pursuit, comes to this. Perhaps the gun gets into the hands of the wrong people. From the stalk by the streamside, the hiding among the moist

sedges, the waiting on the twilight flight, to shooting over one's own wild-fowl, reared by a poultry man at eighteen shillings, more or less, a week.

An experiment south of the Tweed may be of use as showing some of the ramifications of the new-fangled system, ending in duck-ponds and poultry-yards. It is always well to see on a large scale—the details come out so much more clearly. The new reservoir to a canal offered hundreds of water acres.

The scene on the lakes and rearing fields is said to be interesting as beautiful. One lot of young birds are set out in an old orchard quite close to the village. In clutches of thirteen, the eggs are under hens in sitting-boxes, each box being carefully numbered. For the first three weeks, the ducklings are fed four times a day; at first with hard-boiled eggs and bread-crumbs. There were several pochards' nests—presumably birds reared there. One which had nearly completed incubation was extraordinarily tame. She just moved off her eggs and stood close by while the nest was photographed. She then moved on to the eggs and sat there, quite unconcerned, while her own picture was being taken. A wild bird sitting for its photograph, and changing its posture to oblige, is vastly entertaining. If those responsible do not see it in that light, there must be an absence of a sense of humour.

A friend of mine, a charming old fisherman, brought home a clutch of the eggs of the sheldrake, and placed them under a common duck. The ducklings duly appeared, found nothing unusual in the conditions, and followed like little puppies. If one had suggested that he should take them to the waterside and shoot them, he might have used strong language. "Na," he would have said, "if I want to eat them, I'll thraw their necks here."

Such confusion is there between natural and artificial conditions; so is blurred the line which separates tame and wild. The freest of winged creatures are raised as pheasants for the coverts. It is not nice to thraw their necks, and one is ashamed to shoot. Such broods satisfy Huxley's definition of a hybrid as having the vice of both parents and the virtues of neither. And hybrid game yield hybrid sport.

The truly wild life of the land is in balance, is self-adjusting. Wild-fowl seek the places they affect, and fill these to the full capacity. Where are none is no place for them. Possibly the matter looks more serious than it really is. The duck-ponds, where people play at shooting, may be comparatively innocent. Nature may prove the stronger in the long run. Only the half-tamed birds may cross with the wild, and enervate the wild life of the land.

Our wild-fowl quite naturally fall into three

groups. There are our resident wild-fowl, which both nest and winter with us; the fowl which winter, and do not nest; and those in an intermediate state, which mainly leave in the spring, but drop a certain proportion behind to nest here. A fourth group nest with us, and leave for the winter, but with these I have no present concern. The wild-fowl are mainly a northerly tending cult; certainly all those affecting sport.

The common snipe is a resident, the jacksnipe a migrant. The woodcock is in the transition stage; they go north, but a sprinkling remain. So it is with the ducks. With some forms migration is local. Birds may shift about within the country; wintering in one place, and nesting in another.

Why should there be any migration? Wherefore should we be dependent for our winter stock on the autumn flight? Is it not possible to chain the errant forms? Why not breed them here? In the case of birds in the transition phase, this should be quite easy. Every place might have woodcock galore. But why not jacksnipe? To the ingenuity that is peopling the duck-ponds, the difficulties should not be insuperable. All that is wanted is a beginning. If fertile eggs may not be had, why not have the breeders netted and sent south? Those reared here would be not unlikely to remain; that is if their parents were taken from them.

When the balance of wild life within the land has been disturbed, when the centres of activity have been replaced, when colonies of wild-fowl are here, there, and everywhere, when wilful and natural movement—as far as the group is concerned—is checked, and the furthest reaching of our migrants is chained to a duck-pond, then, from the throat of the conventional may well come the hallelujah.

But we sadly ask, whither may we go on pilgrimage in search of wild life? What is left of sport, with its knightliness, its keenness, its freshness all gone? What is that which shoots its hand-reared fowl, and, in each kill, may recognize an old friend? Even the spaniel which licked the pochard in its nest, and was taught not to hurt the young widgeons, might be ashamed to bring the bird ashore. The last of the strikes may be that of the dogs—until some servile curs are bred to do the unsportsmanlike work.

In Scotland, the natural haunts are many, greatly peopled, and from most parts within easy reach. The northern and western islands swarm. Scarce less animated are the fiords of the west coast, and the estuaries of the North Sea. The lochs are large and old, and in the long years have gathered their full contingent of resident, and migrant life. Islets within the lochs are crowded at nesting time, so that scarce may the foot be put down without crushing the eggs.

Here at least men might have been satisfied with the natural resources, and careful not to spoil its wild charm. In some degree it would have compensated for giving over her moors and her game birds.

But she has given over her wild-fowl also. Scotland is modern and even advanced. Certain refinements in her methods might excite envy and imitation. We are informed that birds are taught, by means of a horn, to fly in a particular direction. It is almost as remarkable as the docility of a circus horse, and might make the fortune of a man who kept a caravan. It is interesting, as showing what may be done by a horn. To shoot the creatures so tamed and summoned within reach of the gun is quite another matter. And to insist on calling it sport will really necessitate making a gift of the word, and finding another name for what is more legitimate.

Developments are possible. The disease may spread. The virtue of those who still maintain a show of better things may be sapped. Impatient week-end guests may have to be catered for. Should present fields of sport show exhaustion or become stale, the face may be turned increasingly in this direction.

In the great lakes, whose margins dim away in charming perspective, separated but by a mountain ridge from other lakes as large and animated

and lovely, the experiment may defeat itself. The new life would be conquered by the old, the bond by the free; or would cross to other lakes and thin out in the distance. Loch Leven might serve, in which case we should have the interesting double experiment of fish and fowl being brought up in the nursery. Fish are bound in by the shores, fowl may move about. In so far the new experiment might differ from the old. But some disturbance must follow from each new centre, some lessening of the virility of wild life for each tame contingent. And it were well to let these winged Bohemians severely alone.

As trout are the poor man's fish, so wild-fowl are his feather. The two carry the cycle of sport round the year. He lays down his rod to take up the gun. When the one are out of season the other are in. When the trout are showing the pale fringe round the anal fin and pressing toward the redd, the wild-fowl are casting the bridal plumage, the young are already on the wing. A true and good sportsman of the old school, writing more than half a century ago, talks of May as the month for wild-fowl shooting. He was in the neighbourhood of the breeding-rocks, and no doubt found plenty. That was before a close time was thought of. No one now would think of shooting in May. A May fish and a November fowl, that is the modern order.

On any burn one may surprise a wild duck.

On any marsh flush a snipe, in any strip of trees startle a woodcock. On the outskirts of a village the house garden ran down to a stream. Fishing from the bottom fence in summer, one could hook a trout; shooting from the same fence in winter, one could knock over a mallard. I have seen both done, perhaps been at the doing of them.

Waste land and open water are the poor man's preserve: what lights or flies there is game. These are or have been narrowed, and the privilege as far as possible restricted. The tendency is to carry the policy further. A gossip called on one of the old families, and being asked the news, told how a baillie's eldest son was to be married. "And pray," was the reply, "who ever heard of a merchant of the town of Montrose having an eldest son!" Those who would restrict the right of primogeniture are disposed to deny the use of a gun, or at least of a place where a gun may be used.

The policy may be unwise. The gun has its uses. It keeps light and atmosphere round bare lives, leads into open places, forms tastes which are at least not impure, makes better citizens and better soldiers. It lessens the temptation to poach. It spends the barbarous, if you will the savage instincts, which might seek other outlets.

XX

WINTER

IT was nearing the solstice. The shallow arc of day, no deeper than the crescent moon, told of nearness to the border of night. At noon, it barely topped the low ridge. A subdued, flushed light, with a certain magic of its own, lay over the land.

In a series of short, jerky flights, a shadow kept pace with me. It was a tiny shadow, a hop-o'-my-thumb of a bird. He picked me up about a mile out, where the church steeples of the town were dipping out of sight, in the hollow, by the stream. The air and the road were just crisped with frost. Far in the south-west, the sun was dipping over the left shoulder of the Falkland Hill, into Loch Leven.

The hill forms the eastern end of a short, abrupt range. For no special reason it rises from Strath Eden to break the horizon and hide the winter sun half an hour before the set. Such sudden heights are characteristic of the coal-bearing area of Scotland, sometimes as solitary laws, seldomer as abrupt ranges. None are quite

so complete, so self-contained as the Lomonds. In their very unexpectedness, they are dramatic. Seen in one glance, their rugged features lend themselves to the play of imaginative conceit. Edinburgh is proud of Arthur's Seat. To her partial gaze it is a lion couchant watching over the city. To what the Lomonds, with the height at either end and the level connecting ridge, may be likened it were hard to say. There is the strong head facing west, the flat back, and the weak flank of the Falkland Hill. It may well be a royal beast watching over Fife. A lion in shade. Over all flowed the tawny light of the setting sun that dipped into Loch Leven.

The ridge alone hid the sunset on the water. To the eye, which could remove or look through, the lake shone in the chill glow of warmly-coloured light, suggestive of a winter life unfretted by anglers—of spawning trout, busy pike, and multitudinous wild-fowl.

Together, we passed down the gentle incline; the wren silent under the fence, I making crisp music on the frosty road, and casting a long winter shadow behind. Where a stone had rolled out of the dyke, he went into the hole and did not come out again. He may have had his beat, which he did not overpass. A cunning tunnel may have led to the back, or a windless shelter offered itself for the coming night. So we parted.

From the hedge on the far side came the sharp, melancholy piping so characteristic among winter sounds. Beyond, was more piping. One seemed to ask if the other was there, and the answer came back. For about the length of half a field, the piping went on. The male is a dusky bird. So charmingly dark is he, that when I hear of "dusky" I think of the hedge-warbler. Like the wren, they are companionable, but not quite so pleased to see you, nor so loth to part. So far as they go, they keep talking to each other. They are in pairs, which may be one reason why they are less dependent on the chance passer-by.

The crackling of a robin was somewhere about. He is not silent like the wren. Usually he is heard before seen. No mate is within hearing. He is alone—the most solitary of winter birds. Yet the crackling is on the frosty air. It may be half a challenge, for he is impatient and irascible, notwithstanding his good character about Christmas time. His note is independent, as himself. It is original among the sounds made by familiar birds. No manner of explanation will turn it inside out. One may only guess at its meaning. He is not much given to following. Not that he will let you pass without notice. He will drop to the road, jerk in his characteristic way, and hop on in front.

Further along the hedge came the blackbird's

chirpy scream. It is a voice of the twilight, summer as well as winter—heard at other times, but always then. It is not a call. Like the robin, he is self-sufficient, with perhaps this little difference, that he is not so solitary. Half a dozen male blackbirds are often so near together as to suggest a certain bachelor party. The scream has been vaguely referred to some state of excitement. It is uttered every night, almost as matter of emotional routine. The light was fading down the steep gradient of winter twilight. The day's activities were over. It was on its way to roost. The suggestions were all of quiet and rest.

The grey-green of the lapwings blends, very perfectly with the neutral-tinted air and the hue of the field. The eye wanders over the scene more than once, ere it picks them out. They were very quiet, mostly resting. A grey-green shadow shifted its place only to rest again. The running was hard to follow against the soil. In the short, lazy flights, the green appeared as black. One rose hastily and flew further. It had found some food. Two black-headed gulls were in pursuit. Quiescent as they looked, the gulls were watching the lapwings. They always do. Notwithstanding these movements, the aspect of the field was that of rest. It was a siesta.

From a little strip of wood running down the

fieldside, I could hear the "pink, pink," of chaffinches, and see them rising to the branches with that peculiar climbing flight of theirs. Now this "pink, pink" is a call; one hears it in the springtime. Does it remain a call? Is it addressed to a mate? The chaffinch is said to be a winter bachelor. On that assumption he is called *Fringilla cœlebs.* What has a bachelor to do with a call? Nature seldom deceives, nor permits a confusion of her symbols. To put doubt to rest, hen and cock were sitting on the road, picking side by side. Together they rose to the branch; together they vanished into the shade of trees. So other chaffinches about were paired.

An ash tree near at hand, an elm on the far side, flank the wood. Both were hanging as with living leaves, the slender outer twigs swaying with the weight of pendent birds. Two flocks of heavier and lighter build, differed as the heavy ash from the graceful elm, to which, respectively, they clung. Most of the grain-eating birds flock. They choose just such a perch for the day, dropping down on the field, to rise again on the least alarm.

In a cloud the heavier flock left the ash. Several things told what they were. The wave-like flight, the rise and dip was shared with the finches and buntings. The motion, so shallow and even, that neither rose very high nor dropped very low, belonged to the greenfinch. Each

wave, each hollow, was as that before and after. The flight note too was characteristic. In rising on the wave, these seed birds use a single, double, or treble note, as a sailor might say, "Yee-ho."

In the absence of song—soprano and contralto solos—these flight notes are our winter music. Save for the trilling redbreast, it is mainly in undertones. It is all very sympathetic; sound softened to the turning down of the light. Any day, and all day long, these sounds are on the crisp air. The flight note of the greenfinch is sweet and low, very much of the nature of an undertone. The cloud was lost among the stubble.

The lighter birds left the elms. On uneven and jerky wing they crossed the fence. The higher waves of flight had the broken crests of a gusty day. Nothing could be more unlike the measured rise and dip of the greenfinch.

As the ringing of rare bells in the air, were the flight notes. Whether double or triple, let those tell who can separate out a tinkling sound. This ringing of bells in the linnet's throat is the most charming of winter undertones. Sweet as distant church bells on Christmas morn. The flock drifted down among the stubble where the greenfinches were already busy.

Beyond the Lomonds, the sun had dipped into the Loch among the trout. Swift twilight fell.

The afterglow rose from beneath the water, and came up over the hill. The birds flew to their roost. To rest? Not quite yet. Rather, to spend the liveliest and noisiest quarter of an hour. In a mixture of flight note and song, they all give tongue together. There is no method, only the desire to get enough of sound out. Not music, neither is it discord. It is noise; pleasant enough, but unmistakable.

Each night they break forth in this way, about this time. A most strange vesper, to be gone through, just before the light within and without is turned down, and the inmate of the feathery tent puts head under cover and goes to sleep. It is hard to tell what stirs them. Unaided incursions from the human standpoint, into bird psychology, are usually unprofitable. Far better to make one thing interpret another. If not conclusive, it is as near the truth as we are likely to get.

A wonderful interest is in the suggestiveness. Sidelights are often better than direct lights, and always more charming. Is not the brightness of the setting the most dazzling of the day, and the afterglow clearer than the hour before sundown? This rude, indefinite interpretation runs through all nature.

When the concert or chorus is at its loudest, the scattered voices are sounding. As the band of linnets are noising, for all they are worth, the

blackbird is screaming by the copse, the robin crackling from the mountain-ash, the hedge-warbler piping in the shadow of the fence, one spirit is at work throughout. The energy of sunset, the afterglow which steals up from below the western slope of the world, sets, or finds everything astir.

The vesper is universal. Whether social, or solitary, life is abnormally noisy and active. It is even startling, this sudden awakening from the drowsiness of the afternoon. At a certain hour of the winter day, just before sleep, a wave of influence, subtle as the flow of magnetism, passes through nature; an unseen hand runs over the strings of life and awakens them to octaves of sound.

Feeding in the same field, with greenfinch and linnet, were a vast number of starlings. In and out, on their restless way, they ran among the stubble. Just when the linnets left for the roost the starlings rose. Then came a time of merry madness. As though suddenly possessed they scurried from fence to fence. They turned. In midfield they spread out like a fan. They dropped again, to re-form and dart away afresh. There was no purpose in their flight, only a series of mad antics. No two motions were alike. Each wild whim was on the wing; each bird seemed bent on letting himself go; and that as a prelude to a concert at the roost, to which the vesper of the linnets is as silence.

In a flock of many hundreds, the lapwings came

up against the red glow of the burning frost. They, too, had a wild fit, of a slightly soberer character, as became their greater bulk. High up, as though bent on a distant roost, they held on their way. They wheeled and returned; they mingled in a maze. They came lower down, just over the dimming fields. They rose and dipped, crossed and recrossed, broke and re-formed, and so put more into the last hour of the winter day than all the hours that went before. Suddenly they dropped within the curtain of the fence, to the darkness of the field, and all was still.

So was a riot of motion as of sound; a wild whirl as a noisy vesper, only another phase of that wave of excitement, which trembles through nature, at the setting of the sun and the coming on of sleep.

No four-footed creatures were abroad. A few signs, alone, told of their presence. Little piles of fresh earth, over the pasture field, were cast up by an underground world of moles. In snug corners the hedgehog was asleep. Only the other day a terrier turned two out of the undergrowth. There is no naturalist like the terrier, so long as you confine his energies to the finding. He will cause a barren scene to teem. Other forms are asleep. Hibernation is a common phase, lessening the winter numbers and variety. Even the water vole, on the banks of the Eden, keeps within doors.

For the rest, the habits of the earth mammals are crepuscular, or nocturnal. Even in summer only late wanderers may meet with them. Persecuted by day, they seem to find more peace in the dark. Where the persecution is greatest, the late habits are more pronounced. There are transition phases in the same district.

A solitary sportsman, preceded by a melancholy-looking dog, came through the fence. He was in hope of a hare. No hare scudded before him; not even a rabbit. He came slowly up the incline. In the glow of sunset he was picturesque, touched with the same tawny shade as the Lomonds. Otherwise unlionlike—save in that he was a beast of prey. The picturesqueness was all. His bag remained empty.

An hour later another hunter will quarter the stubble. It will be the hour of the fox. The shadow falls across the moonlit fields, the yelp comes from the pitchy dark of the moonless night. Vision and sound are less familiar than they were wont to be. Three days a week, barring frost, all winter long have the hounds been out and done next to nothing. Coverts once so reliable have drawn blank. A general search made, in view of certain fixtures, revealed but one fox. One covert had a single tenant. Something is wrong; some one has sinned; so it is whispered. Foxes are being destroyed by those who are impatient of pleasures, which they do not

share. A thing most unreasonable, but intensely human. It is by no means a new experience, this dearth of foxes.

Many years ago, that popular master of the hunt, Colonel Anstruther Thomson, declared that only four foxes were left in the east of Fife, of which he had killed three. There have been merry hunts since. The remaining fox has been killed many times. It may not be so bad as it seems. But when a skilled master and a trained pack cannot find a fox, the presumption is that none are there.

Huntsmen are complaining, ladies are getting soured. There has been serious talk of abandoning a sport, whose fitful but fairly continuous history dates back to the eighteenth century. That were a pity, alike for the honour and manhood of the county. The catastrophe has been postponed. After all, what is a hunt without a fox? Patience, and there will be merry hunts yet. The fox in the covert may be killed as often as that left by Colonel Thomson.

XXI

THE TARN AND THE TAIL STREAM

THE tarn is a mountain lake gathered into a cup wrought out in the slope. It is solitary, remote, wild—sometimes very wild—with much of the weird, unexpected, and startling. The scene is bare, save for the dwarf birch, or some crawling willow. Rude also to a degree. The scratch of the ice-plough enters it, as though it had passed but yesterday. The waste lies around.

Of Scottish tarns, two—one to the north, and the other to the south—always appear to my mental vision. Dark Loch Skene is among the uplands of Peeblesshire. It has all the features of a tarn. It is bare of trees. Indescribable; the desolation must be felt. Nor have long ages greatly softened the ruin. Vainly do a few club mosses and fern clumps strive to hide; or scarlet sorrel, and the white-starred cushions of saxifrage to beautify. Quite a little flock of *roches moutonnées*, in the attitude of eternal grazing, approach the water edge.

Anglers go up there. Not of the scant natives —at least not often, save to guide the curious stranger by the elusive way through the peat hags. They who go lunch in solitude, to the croak of the passing raven. The environment is impressive; to the susceptible, overpowering. It is cumulative. At first more easily resisted, it settles down. Lightest in the morning, it gathers as the sun passes the meridian, and the shadows incline to the east. With some, a very little is enough. A morning hour, to say they have been there, and a wide margin of the day, to make sure they will get back. For the hardiest, the fall of evening and the thought of the peat hags, tricky enough in the sunlight, quicken the preparations for departure.

There are, on whom it has a fascination. As certain voices in a room awaken sympathetic chords in a piano, so certain temperaments touch the finer chords of a scene; even such a scene as this. We are not all tuned alike. I remember one, who came from beyond the Tweed—though Loch Skene is really south of the infant Tweed. He was drawn by the spell, held in the glamour. He fished all day. Sad, or rather wistful, St. Mary's was hard by, within easy reach. Douglas burn, of border and ballad fame, ran but a little way off. Most seductive of all, redolent of story and swarming with trout, Yarrow watered its dowie holmes.

In this angler's paradise, amid so many wooers, he sought the scarred, rude-featured tarn. Not once, as all do, but again and again; not to try, but to linger. Morning by morning, so long as he stayed there—and he still returned season after season—he climbed, with his long shadow to the westward. And, in the late twilight, his dim form could be hardly made out descending the slope. Sometimes heavy, oftener light, was his basket. Fish are there; not very large, but fairly numerous. Though seldom disturbed, they have moods of their own, and seem specially susceptible to the subtle changes of these rare altitudes. The water, too, is rarer.

Heavy or light, each was a record day. The charm was not reckoned by the catch. Heedless was he of the number, in his new-born dream of to-morrow. His was a light sleep, an eager waking. Not the hope of adding to the catch of yesterday gave the bright morning face with which he breasted the hill; nor did the luck of the day turn the head on the pillar of the neck, to look back on the scene he had left behind. Subtle the spell that was working within. He found what was not in St. Mary's, or was no longer there: that which had left the valley and taken refuge in the hills. He climbed for what he saw, and still more for what he felt. A little creative imagination might have given it to a higher vision. The vague would have taken

form, the witchery appeared as the witch of the tarn.

The fishing is from the shore. There is no boat—no boat, man has made. Another kind of boat, we shall meet elsewhere. He who would cast far and sure must humour the mountain wind. These winds are fickle, yet, they are the fisher's ally. The still, hot days are impossible. A moving on the waters is indispensable. I have fished where the ripple ran away from the shore, and followed as the chasing breath changed to another angle. Unlike some tarns, one may walk round with a veering wind, without let or hindrance. Last time I undid my cast and took down my rod, the enthusiast was still fishing. As I crossed the peat hags I looked back to wave him good-bye. I have not seen him since, and will always think of him as on the shores of Loch Skene.

Primeval must the trout be that are there. I cannot recall any waterway joining it to sources of fish life below; there may have been when the level was higher, but they are long dry save one. There all ingress is barred. Trout can tumble down if they will, but may not get up. This is the natural outlet known as the tail stream. It has a history past and prospective. Part of the story is already told, and the part which remains may be told with equal certainty.

In these southern uplands are dead tarns—dead as the moon. One such is not far from Loch

Skene. The dry lips are there of olden shores, which the water kissed I know not how oft, and the mould in which the liquid form lay pulsating to the breath of the mountain breeze. At most a tiny rill, born from the impending watershed, runs through the centre. Once that rill was the tail stream. It bore the surplus from the olden loch. Two processes went on together making for one issue. The still loch was silted up by the waste of hill summits settling on the bed. The restive tail stream fretted its channel. In time the olden loch bled to death. The parched lips, the bleached mould alone tell where and what it was.

Loch Skene is slowly bleeding. The tail stream is the operator. It cuts ever deeper in its short and restive course. It surges down, ever more or less stained with its own waste. I have tried to fish; no need is there of wind. The fly dances on the troubled surface, and the bait sweeps whirling for an instant in some strong though tiny maelstrom. Only the nimble among the trout can aim or hold. Then it tumbles out of sight, and must be looked at from below; spreading over the face of almost perpendicular rock, and clinging, as it goes, in a thin white film, so it reappears. No ledges are there where trout may rest for another spring. It curves to the west, as the Moffat burn, to reach the vale beyond, and lose itself in the Annan. In this filmy

spreading fall the tail of Loch Skene becomes the "Grey Mare's Tail."

After heavy rain it changes to the brown mare's tail. Then, perhaps, it is at its best. Where it lashes its liquid hairs into the stream beneath are fish, small and many ; doubtless longing to ascend. Such is the relation of tarn and tail stream.

The northern vision is in Forfarshire, away up one of the glens leading into the heart of the Grampians. The sign is where a burn breaks into the stream, just outside the picturesque hamlet of Clova. The rest is but a following up the mountain side. The tail presents no abrupt fall. Nowhere—as in the case of its southern sister—does it cling to almost sheer rock face, nor spread out in the semblance of a grey, changing in times of flood to a brown mare's tail. It simply tumbles down the rude slope, in a boulder-bristling channel which it has worn for itself, now ruffling into white, now reined for a moment in a dark, fretting pool.

The burn mouth is an open door, for the life of the South Esk ; as the sojourners on a highway may turn into a lane. Beyond, is a possible, if a stiff climb. No check is there, no absolute barrier. A rush up the current, a rest in the pool, and so on from stage to stage. I have fished there. It is a boy's fishing area, compared with the maturer waters, in which it loses itself. Bait and fly are dropped, mainly, in the pools, and the triangular

patches of stillness behind the boulders. Whether any of the captures are natives of the burn were hard to say. Trout are found in burns as small, and with no egress save the sea. Where is free passage to roomier deeps, trout are seldom bound. The natives, if such there were, must have been among the smaller and lanker. An occasional large one was on its passage from the Esk. Trout seek upward from wider to narrower waters : it is a habit of theirs. They rather like the blustering current of an incline.

In the shallows of the pools, the patient and wily heron stands, gazing down the shimmering surface. Attracted by his scaly legs a trout comes within easy reach : or, half exhausted from its struggle upward against the rush, offers the white of its side as a target for the bayonet-like thrust. Over the slopes on either bank, shepherds come on the wine-stained eggs, with the grape-like blotches of the mountain dotterel. Only shepherds—who, with a patient half-attention, watch their black-faced hill flocks by day—find what is so rare.

Here the domain of the water ousel touches on that of his Highland cousin. The one is a bird of the stream, the other of the adjoining drier hill slopes. The dipper rather affects brawling burns, with their endless prattle and gurgle. The main external difference, as every one knows, is that the white lake over the breast of the dipper

is drained in the mountain ousel to a silver crescent.

The songs differ, very much as the haunts do. The song of the dipper is low, rippling, lively. The stream is lively, and sings a low rippling song. On a slope like this, where the stream is noisy, one cannot help thinking that the dipper pitches his song a little higher. He likes to be heard, and is heard, which he would not be, if he sang as he does to the gentler ripple of a lowland burn. There are dippers of the tail stream.

Moor and mountain slope have ever a tinge of melancholy, borrowed it may be from their waste vastness. Moorland birds are affected by this, or express it. Their pipe or whistle has the moorland melancholy, which they tend to deepen. It may be that the two react, and sounds impress us as melancholy because heard on the moor. The song of the ring ousel is pleasing, with just this tinge. If may be that if heard elsewhere it would be only pleasing. But one likes to hear it at home. It has the restless habit of the dipper. Many moorland birds are restless when disturbed. Witness the wheatear.

Near the waterside the dipper's domed nest is placed, by preference in a vertical hole of a size which it may just fill up. The ring ousel builds in the dry stone heap, or under the perched boulder. The nest in my mind's eye is among

ling—the characteristic northern heath, which reaches to higher altitudes than the purple heather. Through the ling appears the cotton grass, which hangs so many pennants out to be blown of the autumn wind. Probably, the situation is somewhat damp, at least in the winter. And the dry fruit fixes the time as not much earlier than July.

An hour or two on either side of midday, there is nothing to tell where the burn may rise. Only mountain rills have a summer habit of running themselves away, leaving but the dry bed. And the large volume, after rainless weeks, raises some speculation. From the arid heights, whose very heather is dusted with the powdery débris of rocks, can so much water come? Straining up the course of the scarce lessening burn—which has no time to play at winding, as its sisters of the plain do—behold the slope ends in a plateau.

Three sides are steep hill summits, and in the deep niche, retiring within inaccessible banks, is water in a long, still, half-threatening sheet. Dotting the engirdling slopes are loose stones, which keep slipping down in miniature avalanche. Glittering as they go with the weird sheen of something out of which the hills are built, they vanish with a sullen plunge. I never tried the slopes, but I could imagine that one who did would be in danger of starting an avalanche, of which he would form a part. The

A MOUNTAIN TARN, GLEN CLOVA

same plunge would put out the glitter and the life.

And no one would see. Save the golden eagle —which circles there almost any day—as his eye swept across, searching the heather on either side for the blue mountain hare. And the peregrine, in hot chase against the slope; after the grouse, which in its haste and confusion inadvertently struck the water, or with the devil behind, preferred the deep sea. Hard by, the eagle builds. Few seasons is the aerie of the falcon empty. And he who would rob the nest of either deserves all he gets.

To the tarn, the burn leads; of the tarn, it is the outlet or tail. The story reads quite simply. The sliding débris of the hills will fill up the lake basin, each avalanche whose weird light goes out in the plunge adding its little. The stream will fret the channel ever deeper. So a day will come—distant it may be, but inevitable—when the moist lips will be dry, and only the stiff mould in which the restless pliant form frets its little hour will be left. This, too, will be a dead tarn.

Trout are many but shy. The visitors from the Esk, which freshen the life, soon acquire the habits of those to the manner born. The water is clear; even among mountain tarns, so different from the oft-muddied sheets of the plain. The conditions are rarer, the changes subtler than those of the glen streams. At midday, when the

sun beats straight down, when the wind is hushed and the air pants, fishing is impossible. One is fain to rest and watch the afternoon shadows growing on the water. There is a strangeness there also. The sharpness of outline one looks for in the hot dry July air of these upland regions is absent. In its place is the indefiniteness of moister conditions. The tarn has taken possession of the hills, to make them differ from other hills: how, will appear anon. The shadows lengthen over the surface. And with the coming of evening, should a spirit pass, something may happen—that is if the breeze strike not the water too far out.

A rise after long casting makes one eager and forgetful. A second makes one oblivious to all save the coming third. With a strike the hills vanish, and all else save the hooked and landed fish. Meantime, the moisture—which has risen invisible in the midday heat to soften the afternoon outlines—comes down in visible chilling mist. The horizon of water creeps in, till no wider than the length of a cast. The slopes around are blotted out, the glen beneath is cut off. The sense of feeling oneself thus trapped for the first time in these rude parts comes back. One were lost, save for the tail stream, whose downward course leads beyond the mist till the valley opens up with its silver thread of Esk. Through the mist comes the light rattle of

descending stones, unsettling others by the way, and the sullen plunge of the gathered avalanche.

A spell is on those mountain tarns, riven-shored, misty, inscrutable, and the fauna which scream around the hill summit and swim in the still, pure depths. Wilder is the pipe of the wader pattering round the glittering shores; stranger the beat of the wild duck's wing, which pitches down on the surface. A witchery grimmer than that of lowland lake is theirs.

Stranger is this, say, after the first touch of winter; though seen of few save the shepherd, or the shooter, who would have a mountain bird in its winter plumage. The tail stream brawls darker between its snow-sprinkled banks, and the tarn lies chiller under the white summits. The eagle hangs in the still frosty air over the white ptarmigan, and the dark fox outwits the white hare amid the white snow beneath. While grouse scratch down to the heather tips at once to feed and to hide.

The search for the symbol of a presence, the fleeting outline of a form visible to the higher sense, is hard as that for "The Holy Grail." Where our fathers saw visions are none. What was once around the homestead is no longer there. The erst sweet lanes are as an empty house. Without pause, save to glance where the network of shadows imprison the sunbeams, or the mist of blue hyacinth shines in the undergrowth, we

pass through the woodstrip. We issue on the pasture where the great steer graze. We turn where the grey ripples break in white on the yellow sand. Many, by the way, say "Lo here, lo there." They be among those who have no true thirst, no aspiration, no sense of other's want. The chalice cup still hides away from eager eyes and dry lips.

The plain left behind, we climb the hills. An uncongenial presence has gone before. Arid are the slopes, the search still vain. A lap of water, as though in the filling of a cup, reaches the ear. A mystic gleam shines, amid engirdling summits, which rain down of their glittering waste. We draw near over the rude approach, skirting the great rocks which rise through the brown heath. The gathering mists play and dissolve, as though some thought were brooding, some meaning about to break forth. A bowl appears resting on its stem, and made golden in the setting sun. Beside is a form, ethereal in its shifting mould. On the shining strand lies craft never launched before. How alluring it all is compared with the empty scenes men call nature!

Sometimes, on lonely mountain meres,
I find a magic bark;
I leap on board, no helmsman steers,
I sail till all is dark.

THE END

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